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$1.75 NOVEMBER 1983

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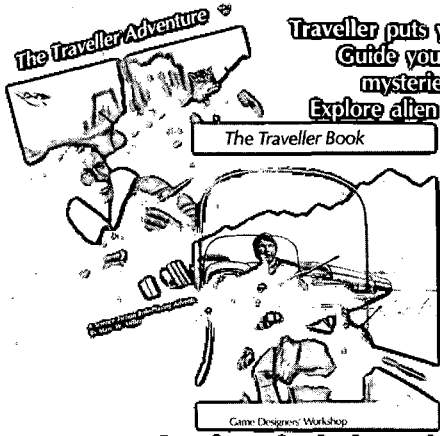

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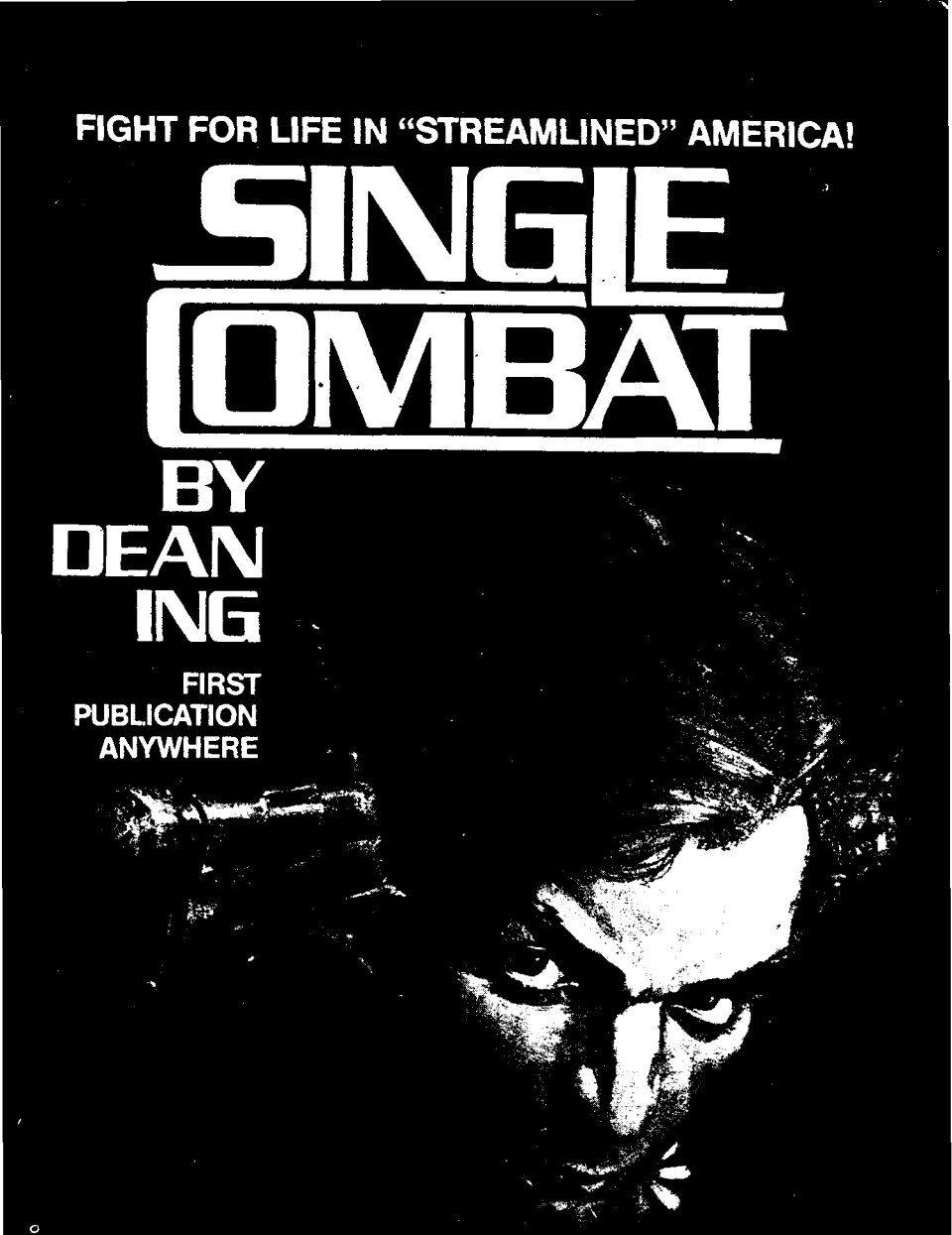

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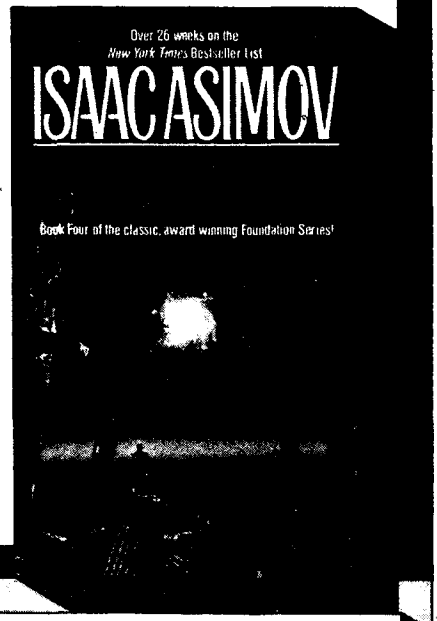
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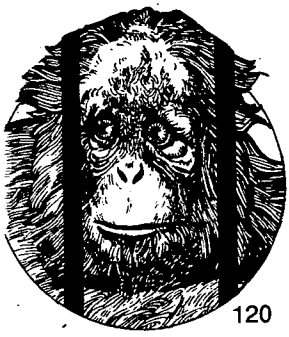

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Shawna McCarthy: Editor

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EDITORIAL

SCHOOLS AND SCIENCE FICTION

by Isaac Asimov

All we old-time science fiction people tend to swap horror stories about our early experiences as SF readers.

In those days, remember, science fiction existed exclusively in magazines which (unlike the one you are holding in your hand at this moment) had ragged edges, blaring titles and garish covers. What's more, they were read almost exclusively by teenage youngsters, mostly male, and mostly introverted.

Parents were, quite understandably, suspicious of these magazines and teachers were indignant.

And so we old-timers remember well how many times parents and teachers would confiscate the magazines. (Property rights are never respected, somehow, when kids are involved—perhaps even these days.) Worse yet, they would lecture us interminably on the subject of something they called "trash."

Every once in a while, a teacher would ask a young man to write a review of some book of his choice that he had read and liked, and the young student might promptly write a thoughtful and penetrating review of *The Legion of Space* by Jack Williamson. You can guess what would then happen.

In the first place, the review would come back with an F. In the second place, the teacher, when questioned by the youngster (who had worked hard on it and turned in a good job), would promptly explain in an insufferable manner that the review was supposed to be of a "good book," a "work of literature," and not of "junk."

I got inured to that kind of thing. All of us did. Even after I had begun writing and had become a successful and respected writer (to others in the field) I was hardened to not being a "real writer," to not writing "real books;" to being, in fact, a rather peculiar character.

When did it change?

In my personal case, it changed by the middle 1950's when my writing income be-

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came higher than my income as a professor. It somehow killed the humor in the jokes about my peculiar hobby. But with time, it changed for everybody.

By the beginning of the 1970's, the *schools* had begun to take up science fiction. My personal experience in this connection came when my beautiful, blue-eyed, blonde-haired daughter entered high school and promptly signed up for a course in science fiction.

I was thunderstruck. "Science fiction?" I said. "You're going to spend time in school reading science fiction for credit?"

"Sure," said Robyn. "And do you know what we're being assigned for reading? *The Foundation Trilogy*, that's what!"

And then, a couple of months later, Robyn came home and said, a little shamefaced, "My science fiction class wants to know if you can come to school and talk to them about science fiction."

"Oh, Robyn," I said, reproachfully.

"Just informally, Dad. About ten of us."

There's no way I can disappoint Robyn, so I said I would come, and on the scheduled day at the scheduled time, I walked into the school. I was promptly led into the auditorium where the entire student body was waiting for me.

I turned to glare at Robyn, and she avoided meeting my eye. Later, she explained that she had been caught by surprise herself. They had not warned her of the change in their plans.

I recovered from the shock, however, and began to consider that after all those years I had become a celebrity to the *teachers* who seemed to be smiling ingratiatingly at me. If they had had forelocks, they would have pulled them.

How did it happen?

Well, I haven't made any in-depth study of the phenomenon, but I have some notions that seem to me to make sense.

1) The students themselves seem to have been becoming more and more interested in science fiction, and the sheer force of that increasing interest was bound to have its effects on the school system.

2) Science fiction was beginning to *look* more respectable. John Campbell pioneered a new *Astounding Science Fiction* (later *Analog*) that looked neat and sober. The ragged edges were gone even before he became editor, while he added a more restrained type style to the title, and quiet, uncluttered, even scientific-looking covers. What's more, science fiction was appearing more and more in hard-cover books and in paperbacks. The magazines themselves became digest-sized and all this raised the appear-

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ance of respectability in the field.

3) The world had begun to seem a bit science fictional itself. World War II had introduced radar, jet planes, rockets, computers, and, finally, the nuclear bomb. In the immediate aftermath of the war, scientists and engineers began talking about going to the Moon, and in 1969, human beings actually stood on the soil of our satellite. There was no way that science fiction, as a field, could any longer be dismissed out of hand as idle escapism.

4) The teachers themselves had changed because they were, literally, no longer the teachers of old. They were a new generation, many of whom had read science fiction when they were youngsters, and some of whom were still reading it.

5) Most of all, however, the credit belongs to us, the older generation. We carried the flame when it wasn't easy. We wrote the material for a penny a word or less, and got the reverse of credit for it outside the field. We read the material against all the pressures from parents and teachers. And we lived to see ourselves justified.

So now, where do we stand?

The outstanding science fiction writers now receive advances in six figures; their books make the best-seller lists; they have even lived to see their ear-

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lier works dubbed "classics" and studied reverently in those same schools that would have failed any student who had dared review them when they were first issued.

It sounds, does it not, like an impossibly happy ending to a corny old rags-to-riches story.

But—there are disadvantages.

I won't talk about the loss of the old little-world of readers, when they and I were both young, and when I knew exactly what they wanted, and when their praise (not money, not fame) was all I ever dreamed of having, and all I wanted. I've talked about that in earlier editorials.

There are more specific disadvantages to be found in the new reputations we have in the schools, however. Very little ones, fortunately, and even amusing, in a way.

For instance— Schools now have a method of raising funds called a "celebrity auction." They solicit some personal belonging from people who mean enough to a prospective audience to induce high bids, and science fiction writers are now on the list. —A manuscript, a signed book, a signed photograph, an old (but clean, I presume) sock or handkerchief.

At first, I complied. I was flattered and it was for a good cause so I would send off signed

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paperbacks. But they wore me out. So many requests began to come from schools (and churches and libraries—all good causes) every day that I finally had to quit. There were more such auctions than I had paperbacks, and there was no way in which I could pick and choose. So now I ignore them all, and I suffer agonies of guilt as a result.

There are also drives to increase reading-motivation among young students. The way to do it is to give prizes. One such prize might be, for instance, a signed bookmark that a proud youngster can put into any book he manages to convince the teacher he has read. Naturally, what is needed are signatures from someone who means something to the kids, so requests are now sent to SF writers. For that reason, I am kept busy signing bookmarks by the dozen. So far, I have managed to keep up with that drain on my time, but if the number continues to increase, I will have to call a halt to that, too.

But these are small potatoes, really. What I dread most is the teacher who gives her students the assignment of writing letters to authors of their choice. I presume that only a small minority end up choosing me, but out of millions of youngsters even a very small minority is large in absolute numbers.

I am compelled to answer these letters (I don't want to disappoint youngsters) and what bothers me most is the artificiality of the thing. The teachers give strict instructions as to what must be written and say, apparently, "Tell him what you like about the story and what you don't like."

That's a bad idea, you see, because I don't want to be told what they don't like. However, one young man almost reconciled me to the whole business. With a fine disregard for the mutually exclusive, he wrote me a letter which I here quote in full (except for his name and address).

"Dear Izic Azimov,

I like your books very much because they are interesting. I dont like your books because I don't understand them.

Your friend."

Thank you, young man. If you find my stuff interesting even though it is completely incomprehensible to you, think how great you'll think it is when you're old enough to get its meaning. ●

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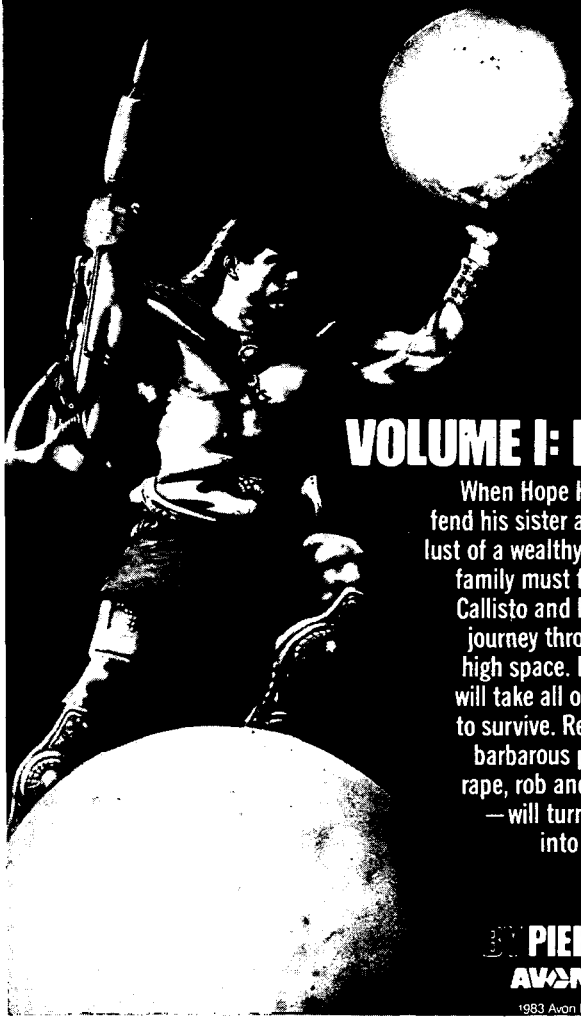

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LETTERS

Dear Ms. McCarthy, Dr. Asimov, et al.,

A while back you asked for comments on how much sex, violence, and other related acts we readers would accept in the name of a good story. Well, let me tell you what I think . . .

Personally, I would accept just about anything. I don't want hard-core, triple-X pornography (I doubt if you would publish that anyway), but semi-explicit sex (and violence) is OK. Since I doubt that anyone under the mental age of 18 or so is a regular reader of your magazine, anyone who does read any explicit material you may publish should be mature enough to accept the more intense realities of everyday life. *That's* what I think.

One more thing—please, please, *please* drop the "Gaming" column. This item does not belong in Asimov's. If anyone is interested enough in role-playing games, he or she can find much better places to read about them than in Asimov's Science *Fiction* Magazine. I think that you see my point.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Rick Pattay
24 S. Melody Ln.
Waterville, Ohio 43566

I can't help but feel that the games are attracting many youngsters who might be (or become) SF readers and I would hate to lose them for lack of a wink in their direction.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I just received the latest issue of *IAsfm* and, of course, put my work aside to browse through it. While reading through the Letters column, I noted one reader who was unhappy that the answer to the crossword puzzle is in the same issue as the puzzle. You answered that you'd like to know what the rest of us think.

As one of those who buys just about every crossword book on the market and who attempts every puzzle that crosses my line of sight, I can tell you from experience that having the answers in the same issue as the puzzle is a blessing. If you get the puzzle completed, you don't need the answers. If you don't, no god in the universe will strike you down for sneak-peeking at the answer page. (Of course, you may get singed a bit if you look before you've tried your best without the answers.)

The only thing I don't like is WHERE you put the answers. As I already mentioned, I'm a browser. When the answers hit my eye I can't always help remembering what some of them were when I go back to do the puzzle. Maybe you could put it near the very back. . . ?

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In the meantime, you might mention to Dr. Asimov that putting the answer in the next issue won't force anybody to buy it. Even a seasoned crossword fanatic like me doesn't buy *IAsfm* for the relatively small amount of silver in the puzzle, but rather for the gold encrusting the rest of the pages. (And the price is excellent, considering what an ounce of gold normally sells for these days.) I love the puzzle—do with it what you will—but, my dear Doctor, that's not why I buy the magazine.

Oh, a quick, unconnected sidenote. For all you people out there who would rather see little or no fantasy in these hallowed pages, phooey on you. If you don't like it, skip it. As for me, I read any really imaginative work with delight and may your anti-fantasy feelings find their way to the dungeons of Althéran to be eaten by a dragon. Thanks,

Sue Werle
Henrietta, NY

Come to think of it, I'm an Anacrostic fiend, and all the Anacrostic books have the answers in the back, and I never look at them. If I can't solve one, I cross it out and still *don't look in the back.*

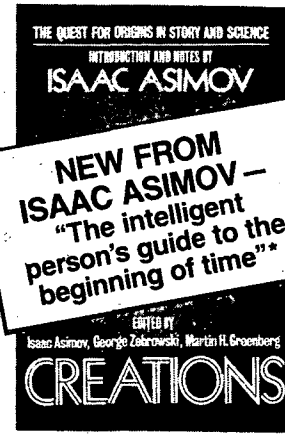
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

(Mrs.? Miss? Shawna? Kindly Editor?) Okay, you wanted the readers to write you, so here goes. First, you are doing a *wonderful* job editing *IAsfm*! The stories are usually interesting and well-written, the reviews excellent (even when I don't agree), and Asimov's editorials neat-o.

But. (Isn't there always a but?)

Look, I love to read SF stories, and for a long time it was enough to just read them. However, as I grew older I found it a joy to actually *think* about the stories—what they mean, imply, etc. (This was a revelation for me, and a *lot* of fun.)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An integral part of this deeper understanding is knowing where the author is "coming from." Just what caused these bizarre and wonderful ideas to spout forth? You can imagine my ecstasy when I read the first Profile in *IAsfm,* and I have been bumbling merrily along ever since. After all, why do you think I read Asimov's autobiography, for *fun?* (Well okay, maybe for fun).

The stage is set. I pick up the March issue, turn eagerly to the Profile, read all about Joanna Russ (kudos to Charles Platt, by the way), turn back to the beginning and read the thing cover to almost cover and OH MY GOD!! Say it ain't so. Argh. I weep. The sun has gone out of my life. Well, if *nobody* else likes the Profiles, you have my permission to cut the number of them down (how about one every few issues?), but for heaven's sake, don't cancel the things *entirely.* Please? Maybe you could save space by eliminating pictures of the author and those big, out-of-text quotes. Have pity.

As for the sex/violence question . . . I've always thought that the only criterion you should use is: Is this story good enough? However, I realize that not all your readers have reached the enlightened old age of 23, so how about having guidelines which can be crossed if the story is exceptional? In other words, higher standards of literary quality in exchange for a few cheap thrills? I guess what it comes down to is: I'm glad I don't have to make the final decision. You *do* have some toughies, eh?

I hope this has helped some (it has been rather cathartic for me), and keep up the good work. Thank you,

Robert K. Cooke

P.S. You know, the *real* reason I want you to keep the Profile section is because when I'm rich, famous and a boffo SF writer I want you to run one on me (hee, hee).

Unfortunately, there are dissenters to any decision, but in return for your good-humor about the matter, I promise that when you turn out to be the next Arthur C. Whatzisname, I will remind Shawna to run a Profile on you as a special dispensation.

—Isaac Asimov

Hello:

Recently you have been giving truth to the rumor that yours is not, in fact, a magazine dedicated to delivering the finest in short science fiction, but merely a dumping ground for rejects, doodles, and practical jokes by otherwise-competent writers that they couldn't sell to any respectable publications. Case in point: the story called "Eat Motel" in the February Asimov's. Now, really! Whoever let that one through should be given a demerit. Please shape up. I like your magazine too much to watch it go down the tubes like this.
Sincerely,

Michael Devich
Lake Isabella, CA

Don't ever say that we're a dumping-ground for rejects. You should read the stories we do reject. Some of them would turn your head gray overnight. What saves Shawna is

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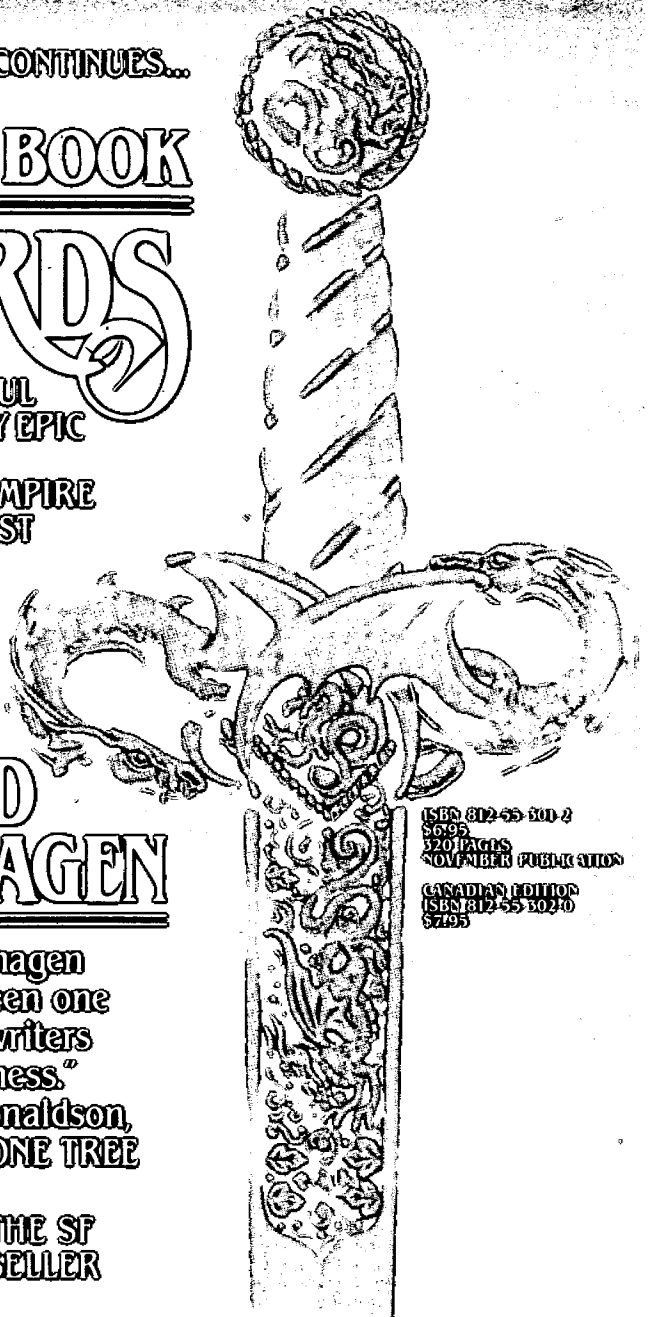

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that she bathes in the Fountain of Youth every morning.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

See if you can slip this open letter to the readership past Shawna for me, please. I didn't want to risk placing her in a position of deciding whether to print it or not. Thanks.

Dear "Letters to the Editor" writers,

For the past few months I have been reading the various praise, complaints and suggestions that make up the Letters to the Editor section. Something bothered me that hadn't bothered me at all when the magazine was under George Scithers. Why are almost all the letters addressed to Dr. Asimov?

Of the ten letters in the last April issue, there were seven addressed directly to the Good Doctor and three others soliciting everybody in general (although one actually had Shawna's name buried in it). Giving one point for direct addressing and ½ for the everybodies leaves us with a score of . . .Dr. Asimov —8½ . . . Shawna—1½.

Now I wouldn't really mind this discrepency if the content of the letters were 85 percent directed to Dr. Asimov but they were not. They were mainly concered with editorial functions that I'm sure Shawna was chiefly responsible for—hell, it's her job.

Everybody seems to get their own names correct so whatta ya say . . . let's give credit where credit is due and let Shawna know we appreciate (or don't appreciate, for that matter) what she is doing. I personally think she's doing a great job!

Sincerely,

Jeff Wheelock

Most of the letters are addressed to me because it is my task to answer them. (I have to do something around here or they'll fire me.) However, Shawna can speak her piece any time she wants to. Shawna, say something—

—Isaac Asimov

Thanks very much for the vote of confidence, Jeff. Really, though, I don't care who the letters are addressed to, as long as they're interesting and opinionated—for good or *ill.*

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Isaac and Everyone,

I am writing about the last three issues of your magazine, namely February, March, and April '83.

Concerning the February editorial, Isaac, I say write more novels. Most of your short stories are good, but I would like to have your work around and readable until I'm eighty and I'm afraid that your short stories would not last that long. Consider how ragged an issue of *IAsfm* gets after just a few readings, compared to one of your novels. I want my grandkids to read your writing, too, so write novels for the sake of future generations.

On to the March issue. "The Forever Summer," by Ronald A. Cross was a fabulous story. Gary Freeman's artwork astounded me. Now, how about an issue featuring art

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by some of the regulars in your mag, say a ten-page spread? I would love to see this.

As to the April issue, I loved *every* story in it. The last issue that I enjoyed this much was October '82. Congratulations on a great issue!

Now for my only complaints. Please, please keep the Letters in the back. I don't think that On Books is the proper way to end your mag (no offense, Baird). And also, I liked Baird's column much better when the book titles were listed up front.

All things considered, you guys put out the best science-fiction magazine on the market, and I am happy to be a subscriber. Keep up the good work!

Paul Strain
300 North 'F' St.
Tilton, IL 61832

Now, remember, my stories always get collected. As I write this a new collection, containing my short stories of the last few years has just been published. It is The Winds Of Change And Other Stories. *Buy it and you'll find they last as long as my novels.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna,

In the March '83 issue you asked us to tell you what we like. *I do not like sex or violence* in the SF I read. The amount of sex in Perry's "Darts" in the same issue is the most I feel comfortable with. Even then, I felt it wasn't essential to the story and could and *should* have been omitted.

I like stories with good ideas behind them, with realistic characters who make me care about them. "The Postman" last year was wonderful, and the sex in that story was part of the plot.

I also care very much about good editing and attention to detail. Inconsistencies jerk me right out of my suspension of disbelief. For example, in Cross's "The Forever Summer" of the March '83 issue, several times someone "throws on a toga." If the writer doesn't know the difference between a toga and a tunic, then the editor should. How could I believe in that Greco-Roman sort of world when someone is throwing on a toga?

I think the Jeppson shrink stories are very boring.

Sincerely,

Margaret Eppsom

Now that I come to think of it, how does one put on a toga? Somehow I imagine a Roman wrapping it around himself and then throwing one end over his shoulder. And did they actually wear it except on ceremonial occasions? Maybe it was just their white tie and tails.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Good Dr. A:

For some years now I have been observing the ever-increasing "sword & sorcery"/dungeons & castles/medieval fantasy stories appearing in the bookstores and in your magazine. I have felt for a long time that it was time for a good satire on this genre of nonsense, but none has been forthcoming.

Until Sheckley, that is. "Dra-

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mocles" was an excellent bit of satire on these otherwise trivial, repetitive, and boring stories. If there was anything wrong with the story it was that it was too gentle, and poked fun, when it could have been devastating. Still, it was thoroughly enjoyable, and I'm glad you printed it. Along with J.O. Jeppson's "The Horn of Elfland," it did the long-needed number on the Tolkien imitators and their readers. Thank you.
Sincerely,

K.A. Boriskin
Framingham, MA

Satire is a compliment in a way, of course: You don't satirize something unless it is so well-known that the nature of the satire can be recognized.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and company:

I picked up a copy of your March issue yesterday, and I'm finding it difficult to explain the smile on my face.

Specifically:

"Write When You Get Work" is quite amusing. It also describes what some of us would enjoy doing to a certain person temporarily residing in Washington, D.C.

"More on Books" leads me to one conclusion. More!

The human in "Mooney's Module" looks quite a bit like a guy I presently work with.

Now, if I may pick a nit, Doctor. In your editorial, you discuss extraterrestrial (and apparently non-human at that) intelligences. Yet, you mention a story, "Homo Sol," in which the species names of the extraterrestrial beings include "Homo." Ethnocentricity?

L.E. Merithew
Waterloo, NY

Ah, but in that story, "Homo" referred to intelligence on a human level or more and not to official taxonomy. I was only a teen-ager when I wrote the story and I didn't know enough to make the point clear.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ones:

Concerning the April, 1983 issue, the story "The Blue Background" by Brian Aldiss: yes this story isn't science fiction, and yes, it isn't even fantasy, but yes, I agree with you. It was a story well worth printing. It was a bright spot in an otherwise dismal day. Thank you.

Also, thank you, Bradley Strickland, for your stories. I've enjoyed both of them.
Sincerely,

Sandy Chinn
St. Albans, WV

P.S. Yes, your cover is nice (actually more than nice), but I do miss the Adorable Doctor's face.

Adorable strikes me as the mot juste.

—Isaac Asimov

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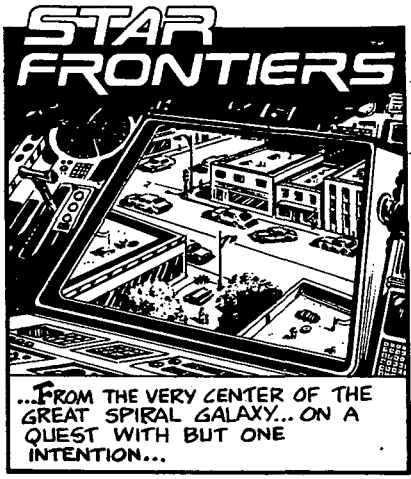

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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

TSR Hobbies Inc. (Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147), the people who created the category of role-playing games (rpg) with *Dungeons & Dragons*® in 1974, now have a science-fiction rpg—*Star Frontiers*.

Introduced in mid-1982, *Star Frontiers* is a boxed game with the emphasis on *action*. Four different adventure scenarios are provided with basic and expanded game rules. Two of the adventures are short, introductory situations: namely, uncovering a breach in security at Pan-Galactic Headquarters, and tracking down a dangerous alien creature that's escaped from the Zoological Park.

Two more complex adventures provided include: searching the wreck of a spaceship and finding out why it crashed, and a government-sponsored mission to Volturnus (a newly discovered planet) to locate intelligent life, if any. A previous expedition to Volturnus disappeared without a trace. This last adventure is long and involved, and two more modules have been published as sequels—*Volturnus: Planet of Mystery*, and *Starspawn of Volturnus*.

The framework or "universe" of *Star Frontiers* involves four different races: Humans (similar to, but not those of Earth); insect-like Vrusk; shape-changing Dralasites; and winged, maned Yazirians.

The four races meet and coexist peacefully in a large area known as "The Frontier." But the peace is soon broken. A hostile, mysterious race, called Sathar, begin attacking the edges of developed star systems. An interstellar police force, called the Star Law Rangers, is formed to combat these outlaws, and the battle goes on. . . .

Star Frontiers was designed to get you into play quickly. The basic rules are only 18 pages long, including glossary, sample adventures, and equipment lists. The expanded game rules consist of 62 pages of additional material on characters, creatures, skills, combat, vehicles, etc.

To play *Star Frontiers*, you first create the character you'll be in the game. Each character has nine attributes: strength, stamina, dexterity, reaction speed, initiative, intuition, logic, personality, and leadership. Each of these attributes is expressed in a number from 1 to 100, with 100 being the strong-

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"MIND-CROGGLING"... Harlan Ellison

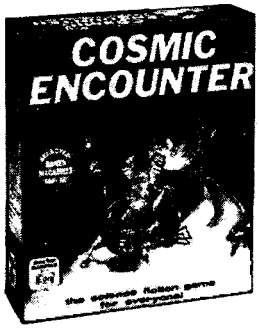
Best SF Game
Games Day, London 1982

Best SF Game
Space Gamer Mag 1980, 1981

2nd Best Family Game
Games Day, London 1981

Ten Best Games Hon. Men.
Omni Mag 1980

Games 100 Best Games
Games Mag: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983



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"So much fun you forget how strategic a game it really is"...Games Mag.
"SF Involvement...fast (paced) and tense..." **Isaac Asimov's** Mag.

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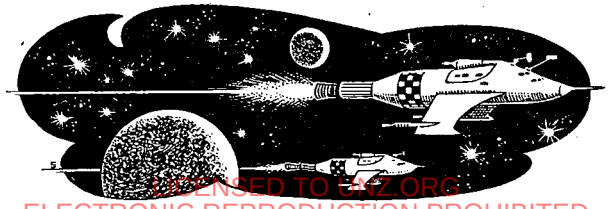
est. The dice are rolled to randomly determine the value of each attribute. Successfully completing an adventure can increase the value of certain attributes for experience. You can be a Human or alien character, depending on your peronal interests.

As in most rpg, a referee is needed to direct the flow of play. Notes in the rules on how to be a referee, plus well-described adventures, make this task easier to learn. After a couple of readings through the basic rules, you should be ready for one of the introductory adventures.

Warning: these games can be addictive! Successfully completing an adventure (which sometimes means simply surviving!), or having your character obliterated in one of them, will probably make you want to play even more challenging adventures. TSR has a lot to offer the novice and experienced SF gamer in *Star Frontiers*. ●



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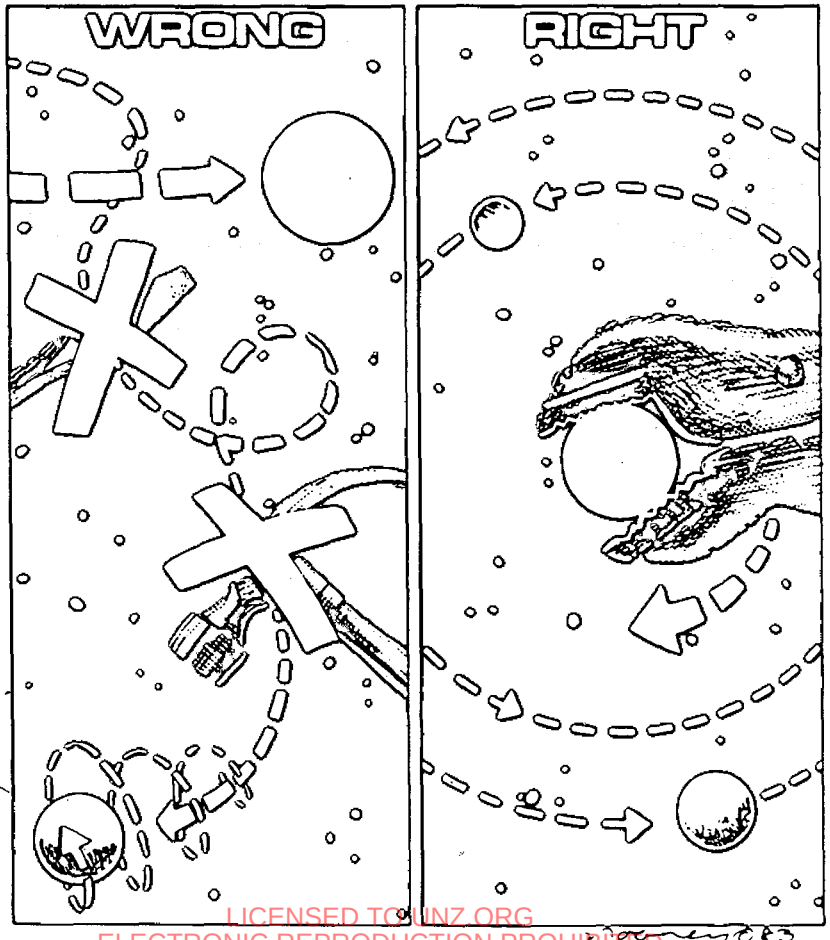
DO'S & DON'T'S FOR CELESTIAL MECHANICS

"MAINTAINING A FIXED ORBIT"



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ANNE McCAFFREY

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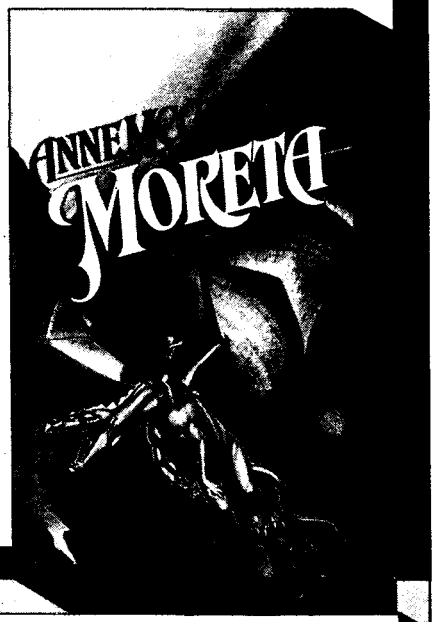

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IAsfm Puzzle #15 by Merl H. Reag

EXOTIC LOCALES

ACROSS

1 The capital of Lilliput
9 Shorthand form of the SF fanzine *Cinefantastique*
12 Neighboring island of Laputa and Glubbdubdrib
14 Jack-in-the-pulpit plant
16 Going on a grand scale
17 Princess of SF filmdom
18 Japanese novelist who wrote "The Woman in the Dunes"
19 Explosive suffix
20 Fun and games
22 Taylor of "The Time Machine"
23 Leak or snake sound
26 Address in the country: abbr.
27 What Jacques puts on his food
30 Rulers rule it
34 Beekeeper's joint
37 Whistle blower, at times
38 Airstrip: abbr.
39 Resident of Samuel Brunt's land of six-foot-tall chickens
42 With none left over
43 Math. essentials
44 Fly
45 Doesn't exactly win over
47 Afternoon quaff
48 New Orleans alma mater
49 Tolkien's —— of Belegaer
51 TV watchdog
54 Transfusion stuff
57 Brazil; for one
60 Finney's wondrous doctor
61 Type of wave
62 Communicates while traveling
66 Want ad
67 Country of athletes in 1932's "Million Dollar Legs"
68 The air around us: abbr.
69 Harbor town in Thomas' "Under Milk Wood"

DOWN

1 Cuban dance
2 Perjurer's admission
3 Heating fuel: abbr.
4 Extreme
5 Israel's Abba
6 Cager Archibald and others
7 Certain New England rep., in newspapers
8 Individually: abbr.
9 Strange land mentioned in "Gulliver's Travels"
10 Groucho is its prime minister in "Duck Soup"
11 Walk out
12 Yogi, for one
13 Participial end
15 "Saga of Pliocene Exile" author
21 Composer's partner: abbr.
24 German thoroughfare
25 Author-composer Silverstein
27 First man to reach the center of the earth
28 Schubert's "The —— -King"
29 Movie critic Jeffrey
31 Musical key
32 Team for an emergency
33 River with many forks?
34 Maplé tree genus
35 Lay asphalt
36 Hoth, in "The Empire Strikes

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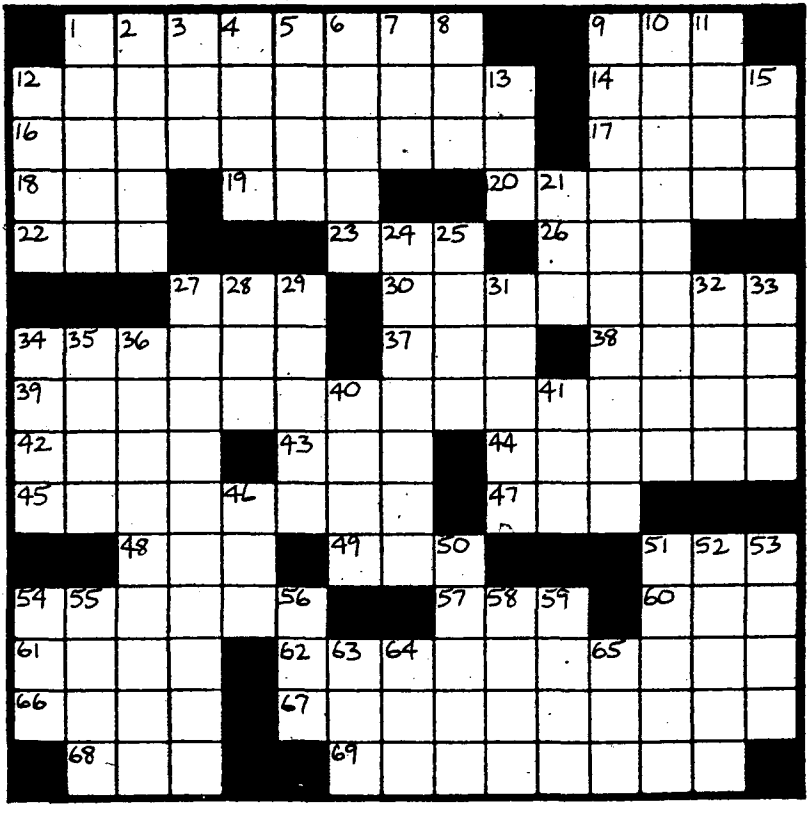
Solution on page 119

Back"
40 Departs
41 Common contraction
46 Abner's chum, on radio
50 Ma —— Kettle
51 Kind of not all there
52 Former West Indies inhabitant
53 Musical ending
54 ——-phi (Greek SF?)
55 —— match
56 Seek info
58 "Them," often
59 Famed London gallery
63 Building wing
64 Lon, late of Cambodia
65 Specialty of Mr. Spacely's rival



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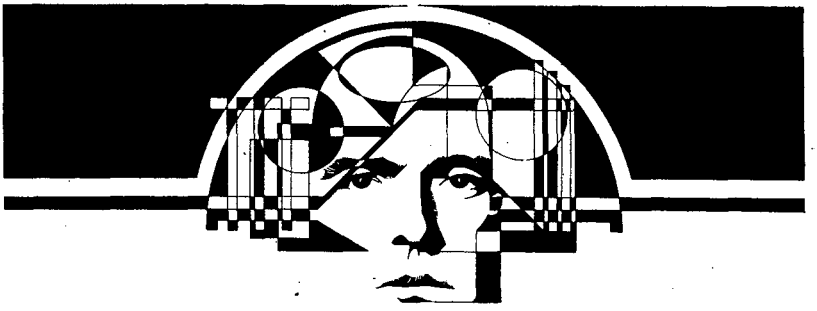
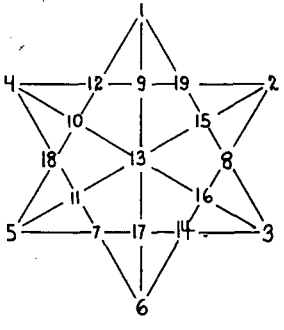
MARTIN GARDNER

THE DYBBUK AND THE HEXAGRAM



I am obliged to plant a grove,
To please the pretty girl I love,
This curious grove I must compose
Of nineteen trees in nine straight rows;
And in each row, five trees must place,
Or I may never see her face.
Now, readers brave, I'm in no jest.
Pray lend your aid and do your best.

The above doggerel, from an old puzzle book, is elegantly answered by the pattern below:



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The diagram is the familiar Jewish Star of David (known to the Cabalists of the middle ages as the Seal of Solomon), with three lines added to join opposite corners of the star. Without the added lines, the two interlocked triangles are sometimes called a hexagram. Like the pentagram, or five-pointed star, it was widely used in past ages as a mystic diagram for warding off evil.

Late one night, when I was poring over a copy of a Cabalistic manuscript—it had been sent to me by an Israeli archeologist who had found the original parchment in a cave—I came upon a hexagram drawn just as you see it above. But there was an additional feature. Each point was labeled with a number from 1 through 19 in the remarkable manner shown in the picture. I realized at once that the numbers were magic. Each row of five added to 46.

The more I studied the magic numbers, the more I was impressed by their symmetries. Opposite corners of the star add to 7, like opposite faces of a die. Opposite numbers on the interior hexagon add to 26. In the center is the evil number 13. A translation from the Hebrew (supplied by my Israeli friend) explained an elaborate secret ritual by which the star could be used to summon a dybbuk from the spirit world.

Dybbuks, in ancient Jewish folklore, are the souls of dead persons who are permitted at times to return to this world, and who are capable of taking possession of the body of someone living. Readers who recall my account last February of how I used a pentagram to summon Mephistopheles, will understand my eagerness to try a similar experiment with the hexagram.

There are two reasons why I cannot describe the Cabalistic ritual in detail. Portions of it are unsuitable for a family magazine, and I don't want to be responsible for the fate of any reader tempted to indulge in ancient black arts.

Now it happens that I own a large black Persian cat named Furicle. After obtaining the proper equipment, I retired to my study at midnight, lit the incense, and started carving the diagram on the room's wooden paneling. Furicle must have sensed that something extraordinary was about to happen because he whined loudly and leaped to the top of a tall file cabinet.

An uncouth gesture completed the twenty-minute ceremony. There was a sizzling burst of bright light from the hexagram, a moment of total silence, then suddenly my cat began to chuckle.

"Congratulations, Gardner," said Furicle, his big blue eyes staring down at me from the file cabinet. "You performed that ceremony admirably."

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"Am I talking to a dybbuk?" I asked.

"You are indeed," said the cat. "I could have entered *your* body just as easily, but this way we can converse. Don't you recognize my voice?"

I shook my head.

"I'm your old friend Jekuthiel Ginsburg. We used to meet regularly in Manhattan, thirty years ago, when I edited *Scripta Mathematica*."

It was Ginsburg's voice all right. He had been an expert on number theory who used to hold monthly meetings of recreational math enthusiasts in the New York City area. Yesterday, he told me, when he learned of my plans to perform the ritual, he had requested permission to respond. It was the first time, he said, that the hexagram had been used this way since the sixteenth century. We chatted for several hours about number theory, while I took extensive notes on problems I may be giving in future issues of this magazine.

"Will I have to exorcise you?" I asked, "or will you leave voluntarily?"

"Not to worry," he said. "I'm a friendly dybbuk. But I won't go until you answer a little question about the star. How many distinct triangles can you trace in its lines?"

It took me about ten minutes to make the count. While I was working on it, Furicle prowled about my bookshelves, occasionally taking down a puzzle book and pawing through its pages. When I announced the correct number of triangles, he meowed twice, then came over to rub his back against my leg.

What number did I give? See if you can count all the triangles (some are easily missed) before you check the answer on page 67. Assume, of course, that the lines of the diagram are unbroken by spots or numerals.

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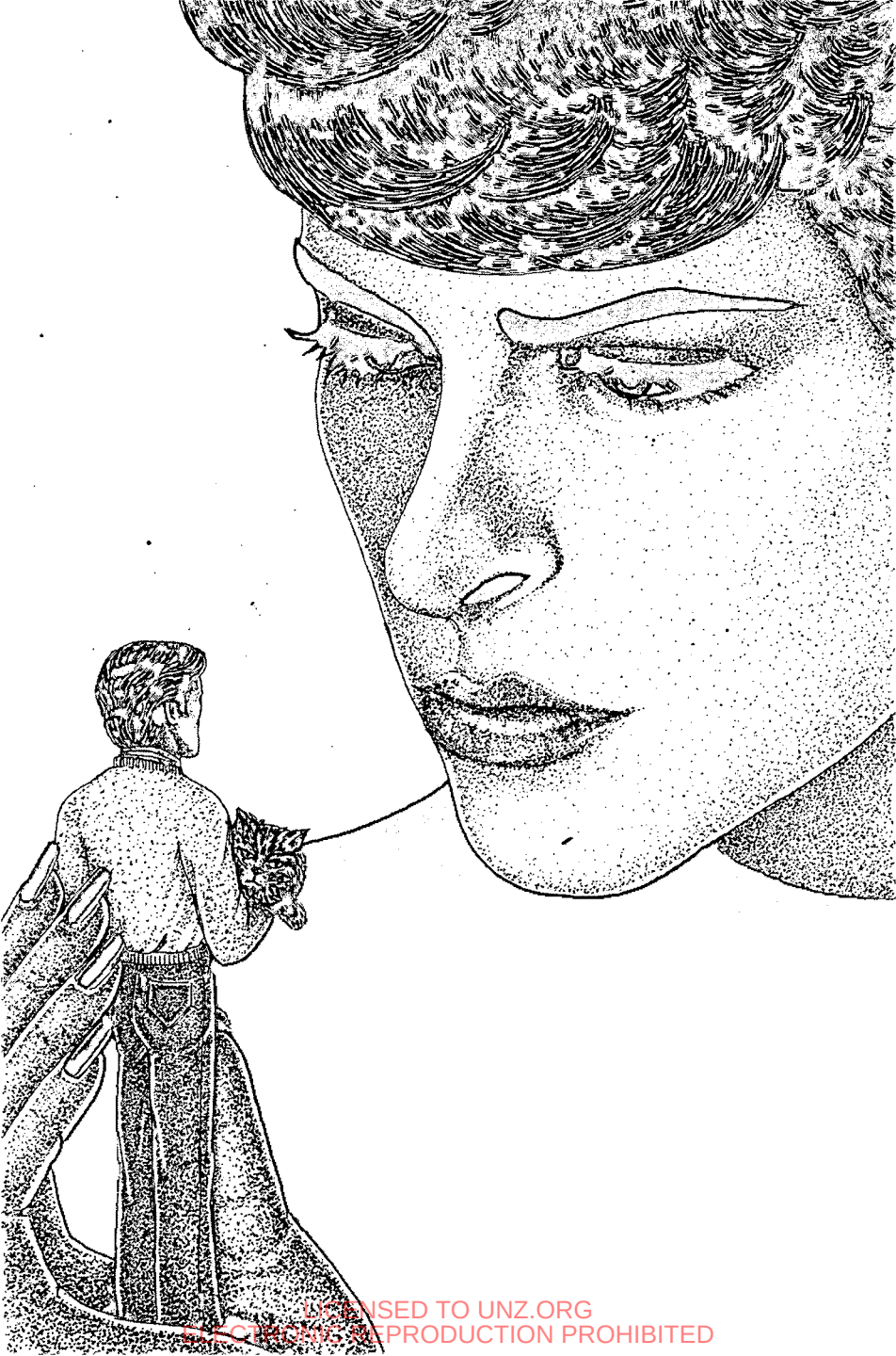

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One of us had to get small. It was getting too expensive to go on as we were.

Alvin was the one who brought it up. We were in the middle of dinner when he suddenly jabbed his bluefish with his fork. "Look at this. Just look at this."

"Is something wrong with it? I know—too much rosemary."

Alvin shook his head. "If we could just cut everything in half. You know—get half as much food, half as much of everything—maybe we could get by. I don't know."

"I'm doing the best I can," I said woefully. "Do you think I wanted bluefish? I wanted halibut."

"You don't have to serve martinis almost every night, and we don't need a glass of wine with every meal."

"It's Gallo, for God's sake. I don't even get the kind with corks any more. And I need a drink after a day at the store." I pushed my plate away. "I don't mind cutting back on things, but how much more can we do? We eat what's on sale or what I can get with coupons. I haven't bought any new clothing in a year. We never go out, and the cable's been disconnected. The car is five years old, and you've even cut down on your smoking. What's left?" I felt fur against my leg, and looked down. "We'll have to get rid of Meowser. That's what you're going to say, isn't it? No more vet bills, no more cat food. Well, I won't. If we can't afford

art: Theresa Fiorenza

The author's fourth novel, *The Golden Space*, was published to high acclaim last spring by Timescape Books. Two more novels, *The Alien Upstairs* and *Earthseed* are due out this year, from Doubleday and Harper & Row, respectively. We look forward to seeing more from her in these pages.

by Pamela Sargent

SHRINKER

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kids, we can at least have a cat." Meowser sprawled on the floor, licking a tawny paw. He was fat, lazy, disdainful, and preferred Alvin's lap to mine, but it was the principle of the thing.

"Meowser can stay. I have a way out of our problems. I've been giving it a lot of thought."

I had been married to Alvin for five years, and in all that time, I had never known him to be practical. "We may be dead tomorrow," he would say as he and MasterCard took me out for a steak dinner. "There may be a nuclear war next year, and then you'll be sorry I didn't bring you flowers," he would murmur as he handed me roses. "They can't take it away from you when you're six feet under."

We had bought what we wanted, figuring we would pay for it later. We were, indeed, paying for it, though not in the way I had anticipated. We were barely keeping up with the bills, and our finances resembled the Polish balance of payments.

"I know your solution," I said bitterly. "Another line of credit. Or kiting checks."

"You're wrong, Jessie. I've got a better idea. One of us has to get small."

"What are you talking about?"

"Remember my Uncle Bob?"

Alvin's uncle, Robert Lewiston, had died a year earlier. We had taken turns sitting with him in the hospital while he placidly waited for death, saying he would be glad to be out of it. Alvin's mother had died while he was in college, and Bob had been his only remaining relative. He had, like Alvin's mother, left a few debts and no assets to speak of, and we had inherited nothing except a large cardboard box; I had never seen its contents.

Bob had made a modest living selling old books and tiny hand-painted marble eggs. The books had been sold to pay off his debts, and the eggs had become collectors' items, bringing ten times the amount Bob had sold them for. We had sold the five he had given us, and had nothing to remember him by except the box, which Alvin had stashed in our closet.

"Don't you ever wonder how Uncle Bob painted those eggs?" Alvin asked.

"I figured he used a magnifying glass."

"Well, he didn't. He used his shrinker. He was always tinkering with something, but most of his gadgets didn't work. The shrinker was one of his early inventions, and the most successful."

"You never told me this before."

"He only told me about it before he died."

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"I get it," I said. "He bought big marble eggs, and painted them, and then shrank them."

"Come on, Jessie. He wouldn't have made a profit that way. He bought tiny eggs, and shrank himself."

"Oh, my God." I poured myself more wine. "He shrank himself. To what size?"

"About five inches. Then he'd paint the eggs. That's how he was able to put in all those little details. Of course, he had to shrink his paints and brushes, too."

"Oh, my God."

"And when he was done, he'd get big again."

"Wait a minute." I was suddenly suspicious. "If he was that small, how could he work that shrinker or whatever it is?"

"Oh, he put in an automatic control, too. Then he'd sit in front of it while he worked, and after a while, he'd be enlarged again. He said it usually took him about two hours per egg—one hour a side."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, Jessie—I swear." He tilted his head and gazed at me earnestly with his brown eyes. "It works, too. I tried it out once, while you were at work. I shrank some books."

"Things like that don't happen. There aren't lone inventors nowadays—they're all research teams in industry or something. Besides, if he had something like that, why didn't he sell it to somebody? He could have made a mint." I leaned forward. "Hey, *we* can sell it. Just think of the money."

Alvin shook his head. "Think of the misery. Industries shrinking people to work on microchips. The Defense Department deciding we should have only tiny Russians. All the people in power would shrink everyone else—and if you didn't behave, squash." He slapped his hand on the table. "Uncle Bob didn't want that, and he knew I felt the same way. He never told anyone else."

I sighed. "What are you going to do?"

"Well, we can't shrink you. You'd lose your job." He smiled uneasily, as if knowing how absurd that sounded. "I work at home. So I'll have to shrink."

Alvin was in the middle of work on a thriller. He had written two books before—a factual account of his year with migrant farm workers, and an autobiographical novel about a boy growing up in Princeton, Indiana. The nonfiction book had received good reviews and a modest paperback sale, while the novel had received mixed reviews and had been remaindered, with no paperback sale

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at all. Exasperated with this lack of success, he had proposed a thriller to his publisher about a man from Princeton, Indiana who was working with migrants only to discover a complicated mess involving the C.I.A., the Mexican government, and a couple of mysterious landowners. This had netted him a good advance, most of which we had already spent, and he had only finished a first draft.

He explained his plan. He would live in my old dollhouse, which I kept on top of the dresser in our bedroom, shrinking himself, his Smith-Corona manual, and his writing supplies. If he shrank his clothes, I would save on laundry, and have fewer loads. Our food bills would be cut in half. He would use only the electricity from one small bulb, which I would place near the dollhouse, and he wouldn't need heat during the day because the bulb would provide that as well. He would use little hot water, and would finish his book in three months. Then I would enlarge him and the manuscript, our debts would be under more control, and we would pay off the rest with the second half of his advance.

A few things were still bothering me. "How are you going to use the john?"

"I'll use the little toilet in the dollhouse, and you can empty it once in a while."

"Ugh."

"It'll be so small you won't even notice it."

I looked down at the floor. "What about sex?"

"It's only for three months."

"*Only* three months!"

"Well, if we get desperate, you can always enlarge me for an hour. Look, it'll work."

Meowser rubbed against my leg. I shuddered, imagining the cat creeping up on a tiny Alvin, ready to pounce. "What about Meowser?"

"We'll shrink him, too. I'll have some company while I work, and you can save on cat food."

We went into the bedroom. Alvin took out the box, pulled back wads of batting, and lifted out the shrinker. The device, appropriately enough, was rather small, a flat, rectangular object of wire and crystal no more than five inches long. A tiny lens was embedded in one side; on the other, there was a button and a little switch. I was afraid to touch it.

"Is it as simple as it looks?" I asked.

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"Sure is. You pull the switch down when you point the lens at me, and I shrink. You pull the switch up, and I enlarge."

"What are the numbers for?" The side of the device bore a tiny, moveable arrow and numbers from 1 to 12.

"That's for the automatic controls, but you won't need that." He pulled a long cord out of the box. "You can store a little power in it, but we'll be doing a lot of shrinking, so we'd better leave it plugged in."

"You mean it uses electricity?"

"It has to get power from somewhere." He connected the cord to the shrinker, plugged it in, and set it down on the bed.

"Don't leave it there." He picked it up. "Don't touch it."

"For Christ's sake, Jessie."

"You can't shrink anything yet. I have to clean the dollhouse."

I was trying to postpone the inevitable. I wiped out the dollhouse, dusted off the furniture, and arranged it. All of the furnishings, with the exception of the bathroom fixtures and the tiny kitchen sink, were functional; I had always insisted on authenticity in my dollhouse, never imagining how it would be used.

Alvin had arranged his clothing and supplies on the floor. "That ought to do it for now," he said. "You can shrink anything else I need later."

"I can't do it." I backed away and cowered in the corner. "I can't do it, Alvin."

"I'm counting on you. Come on, I'll show you." He aimed the shrinker at his typewriter and pulled the switch.

A bright beam shot out of the lens; I heard a short whine and then a pop as air rushed to fill the empty space. A tiny typewriter sat on the floor. "Now watch." Alvin pressed the button below the switch, and the switch lifted. "That's so you don't enlarge it again. Now you're ready for more shrinking. Try it."

I shrank two reams of typing paper and two bottles of Liquid Paper. The machine vibrated slightly as the beam appeared. As I picked up the tiny objects and put them inside the dollhouse, I was trembling, still unable to believe the shrinker had worked.

Alvin, all six feet of him, now stood in front of me, holding Meowser. "The moment of truth. Fire away."

"Now?"

"Why wait?"

"Oh, Alvin. Can't we think of something else?"

"I'll have more room in that damn dollhouse than we have in this apartment. Pull the switch."

"Oooh." I held the shrinker, aimed it, and flipped the switch,

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then closed my eyes. When I opened them, Alvin was gone. I blinked, and looked down.

My husband, all five inches of him, was staring up at me from our rug, and I was grateful that we didn't have a carpet with plush piling. Meowser, still in his arms, was no bigger than an insect.

I reached down with one hand, Alvin climbed aboard, and I lifted him up to the dresser, setting him down inside the little picket fence surrounding the house. He climbed off my palm and put Meowser down. I whimpered; tears rolled down my cheeks, splashing against the dresser surface.

"Stop it!" Alvin piped, cupping his tiny hands around his mouth. "I'm getting soaked." His voice was so small that I had to strain to hear him.

"This is ridiculous," I said, struggling to control my weeping. "Your uncle shrinks himself to paint eggs, and you shrink yourself to write a book. It isn't worth it."

"Not so loud!" He slapped his hands to his ears. "You've got to speak softly, or I'll go deaf."

"Let's call it off. Please."

"Oh, no. I'm going to stick it out." He glanced at Meowser, who was clawing at the fence; I heard an almost inaudible meow. "And you'd better shrink Meowser's litter box quick. I think he's going to need it."

I slept badly that night, unused to having the bed to myself, and cried some more, pressing my face against the pillow so that I did not wake Alvin.

He was still in bed when I got up, lying in his little bed on his shrunken sheets with his hands behind his head. I went to the kitchen and prepared breakfast, using an eyedropper to serve coffee and a toothpick for the scrambled eggs, then tore off a corner of my toast, serving the food on the dollhouse's plates with some shrunken silverware.

"Ah," Alvin said in his tiny voice. "Breakfast in bed." He ate while I shrank Meowser's bowls and set them inside the little kitchen.

"Anything else you need?" I asked Alvin as he descended the dollhouse staircase to the dining room.

"You could clean the toilet. I had to use it last night."

"I'll shrink you a can of Lysol and clean it when I get home." I leaned against the dresser. "Oh, Alvin."

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"I'd better get to work." He sat down at the dining room table and pulled the typewriter toward him.

I was to tell our friends that Alvin had gone back to California to work on his book. If anyone came over, I was to close the bedroom door.

When I got home, I fixed drinks, determined to keep things as normal as possible, serving Alvin's with the eyedropper. When I returned to the bedroom with supper, Alvin was at the kitchen table, chopping up a pinch of tobacco as he prepared to roll his own cigarettes in tiny papers. He shook his head and mumbled something.

"What?"

"I said, it takes forever to roll one of these cigarettes. Couldn't you shrink me a few packs?"

"Oh, no. We're supposed to save."

"Well, you'd better shrink my megaphone—I'm getting tired of shouting." He went into the dining room, seating himself across from his typewriter; I couldn't see that he had written that much, but then it was hard to tell. "Ah. Grub at last." He picked up the little bowl and peered into it. "What the hell is this stuff?"

I looked up from the butler's table I had set up near the dresser. "It's chili con carne. Can't you tell?"

He pushed the bowl, which held one kidney bean and a speck of meat, away. "God. It looks disgusting."

"You always ate it before. You'd ask for seconds."

"It looks like a big slug."

"Well, eat it anyway. I didn't fix anything else."

"Jessie, you don't understand. There's this big lump of greasy-looking meat in there, and a thing that looks like the creeping unknown, and a giant leaf—that must be an herb."

"Give it to me." I dug at the chili with the point of my knife, breaking it into little pieces. "There. How's that?"

"Now it looks even worse. Can't you shrink me a bowl?"

Somehow I controlled myself. "All right—just this once. But no more. We're supposed to save."

"And watch it with the beer. This glass is mostly foam."

"Well, it's hard to serve beer with an eyedropper."

We got through dinner. By the time I had finished the dishes and taken care of some housecleaning, he was back at work on his book. A small cloud of cigarette smoke circled his head as he pecked at the tiny keys. I had given him a chocolate for dessert,

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most of which sat in its brown paper cup in the middle of the table; he had eaten only a wedge.

When I said good night to Alvin, he was in his living room, sitting in the rocking chair as he nibbled at another wedge of the chocolate. "Hey, Jessie. Could you shrink me some Graham Greene? I don't know if I can sleep."

I was concerned. "Are you feeling all right?"

"I'm fine. I've just got insomnia, that's all."

It was hard to tell from his tiny voice how he felt, and his eyes were too small to reveal his emotions. I longed to pick him up and hold him, but was afraid I'd either crush or smother him. At last I put out a finger and he held it, resting his cheek against the back of my nail for a moment.

"Oh, Alvin," I sighed.

He pulled away. "You've got breath like a buffalo."

"I brushed my teeth."

"It's a lot more noticeable now. You'd better clean your nails, too." He paused. "You can shrink the new Paul Theroux while you're at it."

I shrank the books and set up a small flashlight near the living room. As he settled himself in his chair, I said, "Let's stop. It's only been a day, and I don't think I can take any more. Why don't I enlarge you again?"

He picked up his megaphone and lifted it to his lips. "Look—the first day's bound to be the hardest. We'll get used to it. Just keep thinking of the money we'll save."

We got through the next week and a half without incident. Alvin was making progress on his manuscript, which had grown to nearly a sixteenth of an inch in height.

On the second Sunday after his miniaturization, I shrank the New York *Times* for him, then went downstairs to do the laundry. I had only half as much as usual, so we would save a little, since I needed fewer coins for the machines. Food was still a problem; there were few things that didn't look unappetizing on Alvin's scale of existence, but I was becoming more expert at arranging them properly on his little plates. And, though Alvin was drinking much less, I was drinking more, trying to soothe my nerves. I could not help thinking of how vulnerable he was.

As I was folding my clean laundry, Mrs. Grossman entered the room with her basket, greeted me, then set down her clothes and peered over my shoulder. "Why, look at that."

"What?"

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"Those little doll's clothes. Aren't they cute." She picked up a pair of Alvin's jeans. "Why, they look so real. There's even a little label."

"Well, you know Calvin Klein," I said uneasily. "He'll put his name on anything."

"Look at this," Mrs. Grossman called out to Mrs. Hapgood, who had just come in. "These are the cutest things I've ever seen. Tiny Calvin Kleins." Mrs. Hapgood rushed over and peered at the jeans. "And a little pair of Levi's. I wonder how they do it."

"Um," I said, taking the jeans from them.

Mrs. Hapgood picked up a pair of briefs, holding them up with two fingers. "I didn't know dolls wore jockey shorts. Look, they're labeled, too—Fruit of the Loom. Are these for a Ken doll or something?"

"No," I said sadly. "Ken dolls are larger."

"Little fitted sheets." Mrs. Grossman held one up. "It even says Sears." I took the sheet and folded it, trying not to betray my nervousness. "So authentic. Where did you get them?"

"Um."

"You must tell me, Jessica. My granddaughter would love something like that."

"Er, they're my niece's," I said quickly. "For her dolls. I don't know where she got them. She left them here last time she visited. I figured I'd wash them and mail them to her."

"You must find out where she got them."

"I'll try." I picked up my clothes and hurried from the room; at least they hadn't seen Alvin's little laundry bag and tiny socks, which might have made them wonder even more.

I was unprepared for what I would find in the bedroom when I returned.

A dead fly lay inside the fence, skewered with a pin. Alvin was sprawled in front of the dollhouse, one arm over his eyes.

"Alvin?" I was afraid to touch him. He stirred. "What happened?"

"Don't shout." He got up, looking unsteady, and went into the house, then picked up his megaphone. His tiny hands were shaking. "A fly attacked Meowser. I had to kill it."

"Where's Meowser?"

"Under the bed. I don't think he'll be out for a while."

I stared at the fly. "Well, you sure got it. You're still a lot larger than a fly."

"But Meowser isn't. And it's hard to stab one of those guys. Its

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buzz sounded like a motorboat, and its eyes—ugh. I think I've got blood on my pants." He seemed a bit calmer as he went into the dining room and sat down, propping his elbows on the table as he held the megaphone. "It could have been worse. If it had been a bee, I'd be finished. You've got to make sure you don't let any more into the apartment."

"I'd better check the place. I'll get a can of Raid."

"No! Do you want to kill me?" He set the megaphone down and rubbed his temples. "No Raid," he said in an almost inaudible tone.

He looked pitiful, sitting at the table with tiny sections of the *Times* scattered across it, and my heart went out to him. "Alvin, shouldn't we enlarge you? You're in danger all the time. I worry constantly about what might happen."

"What do you think I do?" He picked up the megaphone. "Look, I'm okay. I'm not going to be scared off by a fly—I'll get along." He paused. "Maybe you could shrink me a couple of Valiums."

A month had passed. I had gone over our bills, and the news was not good.

Alvin was sitting at his table, making notes along the margin of one page; catching sight of me, he picked up his megaphone. "Jessie? You'd better buy me more paper—I'm running low. You can get a couple of typewriter ribbons, too."

I sat down in front of the dresser. "How can you possibly be out of paper?" But I knew. He had thrown out many tiny scraps over the course of the month, more than he had used for the manuscript itself. "Why can't I just cut some paper into little pieces?"

"That won't work. The shrinker will only enlarge things that have been shrunk. Uncle Bob made sure of that. It's a safety feature—otherwise, you might enlarge something by accident. Like a fly." I shuddered. "I can't turn in manuscripts on inch-long paper."

"I have news for you, Alvin. I just went over our bills. We've only saved thirty bucks."

"Thirty bucks!"

"That's right."

"But that's impossible."

"Oh, no, it isn't. The electric bill is huge. It wiped out almost everything we saved on other things."

Alvin shook his head. "It must be the shrinker. Uncle Bob didn't tell me how much power it used. There's just one answer. Don't shrink anything unless you have to."

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I was angry. "Damn it, you've been small for a month, and all we've saved is thirty bucks. Is it really worth it?"

"Just don't use it unless you have to."

"I was going to use it tonight," I wailed. "I was going to enlarge you. How can I be romantic with someone who's five inches tall?"

"It'll be all right," he shouted through the megaphone. "I'm making progress with this book—maybe I'll be done with it sooner. You know, it's funny—when I'm alone, I don't feel small. Everything seems normal. I only feel small when you're around."

I had, unhappily, heard that line before, although in different circumstances. "Listen. I'll enlarge you, and we'll celebrate the end of the month, okay?"

"Oh, no. I'm going to be practical for once. You always said I wasn't— Well, I'll prove you wrong."

Within a week, I was in slightly better spirits. Being fearful of having friends over, even with the bedroom door closed, I spent more time at their homes, often staying out for most of the evening; it was a relief to be with people my own size. But I worried about the effects of solitude on Alvin, with no companions except Meowser and a giant wife. He was smoking more; his tiny ashtrays were always filled with minute butts. He would take two or three more drops in his martinis, and often several drops of wine. He could not speak to me for more than a few minutes at a time, because the effort of shouting through the megaphone exhausted him and made him hoarse.

He was, of course, used to solitude, to long days at work, but when he had been large, he'd had some social life. Occasionally I toyed with the idea of shrinking a couple of his drinking buddies so that he'd have some company, but rejected the notion. His two best friends were also penurious writers, and they were unprincipled enough to take the shrinker and sell it, no matter how much misery it caused. I could have shrunk myself, but I shrank from that; if anything went wrong with the automatic device, we would both be tiny forever.

I had also worried about the long-term effects of shrinking. "Don't worry," Alvin had reassured me. "Uncle Bob would sometimes stay small until the dust was to his ankles."

"He didn't stay small for three months."

"It's okay," Alvin had said. But there were many evenings when I came home to find him in his little rocker, his tiny face growing paler from the lack of exposure to sunlight, his little hands tightly clenching the arms of the chair. I was beginning to see him as a

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little man, and wondered if I would ever again see him in any other way. He, I was sure, was beginning to view me as a giant, engulfing woman, someone who would swallow him.

In the middle of the second month, I came home, mixed the martinis, and strode into the bedroom with my glass and the eyedropper, only to find Alvin pacing from the house to the fence.

"Jessie?" he shouted through his megaphone. "I've been screaming at you ever since you came home. Didn't you hear me?"

I set the glass and the dropper down inside the fence. "What is it?"

"Meowser's gone."

"What do you mean, he's gone?"

"It's my fault. I was going stir-crazy, so I decided to take a walk around the dresser, and when I opened the fence, he slipped through. I tried to catch him, but he crawled over the side and went down to the floor. You should have seen him. He'd rest on the edge of a drawer, and then keep going."

I froze, then looked down at my feet, imagining the tiny cat crushed under one of them.

"You've got to find him."

"How am I going to do that? He could be anywhere. My God—if he's under the bed, he'll choke on the dust." I had never been good at cleaning places no one was likely to see.

"I don't think he's in this room. You left the door open this morning, and I saw him go through it. I don't think he's come back yet."

I got down on my knees and searched the bedroom anyway, but found no sign of Meowser. "He's not here," I said as I stood up, "so he has to be in one of the other rooms. I'll find him."

I tiptoed out, closed the door, and crawled around the apartment. "Here, kitty, kitty." I lowered my voice. "Meowser." Even though the apartment was small, it took a couple of hours to search it as I strained to hear his tiny meows and prayed that he wouldn't run out only to be crushed under a hand or knee.

At last I went back into the bedroom, where Alvin was sitting on the base of my glass, his back resting against its stem. "He's not here," I said.

"He has to be."

"Oh, my God." I lifted my hand to my lips. "He must be out in the hall. The door was open when I went to put down the groceries." I ran out to the hall and dropped to my knees, peering at the carpeting.

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"What's the trouble, Jess?"

I looked up. Dan Elton stood in his doorway across the hall, sipping a Budweiser.

"Er—a contact lens." I grinned and slapped the carpet. "I lost a contact."

"I didn't know you wore contacts. Let me help."

"Oh, no!" I almost shouted the words. "I don't want you to bother."

"That's okay."

"No, please. I'll do it myself."

He closed the door, looking miffed. I sat on the floor, discouraged. Meowser was probably gone for good, even though he could not have gone far. Getting to the elevator at the end of the hall would be a long trek; he would never make it out of the building, and would be forced to forage for crumbs, if he survived at all. He was probably terrified, having no way to understand what had happened to him, and might have crawled into a crack somewhere, waiting to die.

The door next to ours opened, and Luci Baumgarten gazed out at me. "Jessie?"

"A contact. I'm looking for a contact."

"I didn't know you wore contacts. Listen, I just wanted to tell you—I'm having a party this Saturday, so come over if you want. I mean, come over if you want. You're probably lonely with Alvin out of town."

"I'll think about it." Luci and her roommate only invited us to parties when they were planning to have a mob over and didn't want complaints about the noise.

Luci leaned against her door frame. "Is something wrong? I mean, is something wrong? You don't look so good."

"Oh, I'm fine." I started crawling again, and saw Meowser.

He was sprawling beside the moulding, licking one paw; I could still see his look of feline self-satisfaction, tiny as he was. Afraid that Luci would see, I was very still, but kept my eyes on the cat. "Er, thanks for asking me," I said without lifting my head, wishing that she would go back inside her apartment.

"I'll see you." Luci closed her door. Meowser was trotting away. I lunged, cupping one hand over him; he darted out from under my spread fingers and I caught him with my other hand, then got up and went back inside.

Meowser lay in my palm, seemingly unperturbed as I took him to the bedroom and deposited him inside the fence. Alvin ran to

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him, picked him up, and shook him. "Bad kitty," he piped as he hugged him. "You're such a bad old cat."

"For God's sake, keep the fence closed." I sat down and picked up my drink; it was no longer cold, but I drank it anyway. "I don't want to go through that again—Dan and Luci must think I'm nuts."

"You mean they saw you?"

"I told them I was looking for a contact. They didn't see Meowser, but that was just luck. I don't know how long we can keep this up without somebody getting wise." I sighed. "This is all my fault. If I hadn't kept bitching about money, you would never have come up with this idea."

"I don't know." He picked up the megaphone. "I had the shrinker, and I probably would have tried it sooner or later, just out of curiosity." He turned and walked back to the house. His voice, small and piping as it was, had also sounded distant and removed.

I was happier with our accounts by the end of the second month, though we had saved less than Alvin had optimistically predicted.

"Half of MasterCard is paid off," I said when I had given Alvin the news. "Now all we have to worry about is the bank loan and Visa and our car payments. Look, can't you enlarge yourself now? We still aren't saving all that much, because the big bills don't change. We still have to pay the same rent, and keep up the car, and all of that."

Alvin pushed his manuscript aside and picked up the megaphone. "I've been thinking. If I stayed small, we could live in a smaller place when our lease runs out. Combine these savings with how we're doing now, and it could add up over a longer period of time."

I gaped at him. Being small had affected his reason. "Oh, no. I won't stay married to a man your size. You can't ask me to do that. Being married to a writer is bad enough."

"I could enlarge myself once in a while. I wouldn't be small all the time—just most of the time."

"I can't believe it. You should be dying to be large again. I don't know how you stand it."

"You get into it after a while." He looked away for a moment. "I've had a lot of time to think lately. If you look at it a certain way, the scale of things doesn't really change all that much. The universe is still just as vast, and the earth is just as small in comparison, and all of us are just little creatures crawling over

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its surface. So being small reminds me of my own limits—my own finitude. And on the other hand, I think I have more of a feeling for the tiny things that make up the whole—the birds, the ants, micro-organisms, atoms."

He paused for a moment and leaned back in his chair, resting his arm, then lifted the megaphone again. "I know it may seem strange to you, but sometimes I feel freer now than I did before. At first, I'd get a little depressed—missing my friends, being so dependent on you—but now, I feel freer. It's as if everything outside has shrunk, instead of me, and I can see what's really important for a change."

I was stunned. My hand darted toward him reflexively until I remembered that I could not hug him. I drew away. "I'd better shrink you some Valium."

"I don't need it." He went back to work, oblivious of my presence.

In the middle of the third month, I was preparing to leave work with the shrinker in my purse, and was terrified of being discovered.

Alvin had put me up to it. "You've got to do something for me," he had said the night before.

"What is it now?" Keeping up his little house and cleaning up after him and the cat had become a chore. The house might be small, but the work seemed to grow—dusting, filling a little water pitcher, wiping off the floors, emptying wastebaskets, ashtrays, the toilet, and Meowser's litter box while looking after the rest of the apartment and doing all the cooking and shopping. My work had not diminished, and the house was beginning to show signs of wear; the little toilet was stained and the furniture bore Meowser's tiny scratches.

Alvin was in the little bathtub, into which I had poured warm water. He stepped out and dried himself with a piece of terrycloth, then tied it around his waist and went into his bedroom, picking up his megaphone. "I'm getting fat."

"Oh, you certainly are. You must weigh a whole pound by now."

He slapped his belly. "I am. My clothes don't fit. It's those damn chocolates you bring me. My jeans are too tight."

"Go on a diet and write in the nude. No one's going to see you."

"I've been thinking. You could get me new clothes for nothing. I need some for when I go into New York with the book. And I could use some underwear—my stuff is really getting ratty."

"You can buy some when you're done. You're almost done with that book, aren't you? You'd better be."

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He ignored my question. "You could take the shrinker to the store."

"Oh, no."

"You could shrink me everything I need, and it wouldn't cost a dime. You could walk out with a wardrobe in your pocket, and they'd just write off the loss."

"No. It's impossible. If anyone sees me, we're finished, and if anything happens to the shrinker—"

"You put it in your purse. Then you wait until the store closes, and you're the last one to leave work. You go to men's wear and you shrink the stuff and come home. I've been there when I've picked you up—it'd be simple. No one would see you."

"What if someone snatches my purse? You'd be small forever."

"Just make sure they don't. You can call a cab instead of taking the bus. It'd be easy."

"It isn't worth it, not for clothes." I shook my head. "And it won't stop there. You'll decide to shrink yourself a new car or a new TV set or some appliances. It'll go on and on."

"Well, it would save money. You have to admit that. And I've been thinking of renovating this house. If I stay small, I could—"

"You won't stay small." He backed away, dropping the megaphone and covering his ears. I lowered my voice. "I won't do it. I've found out something lately. I don't care about money as much as I used to—I just want my peace of mind."

But he had talked me into it anyway. I marveled at that as I went to my locker, removed my purse, and clutched its precious contents to my chest. A man five inches tall could still tell me what to do. I had been nervous all day, and the other clerks in cosmetics had been giving me strange looks.

I dawdled until the room was empty, then hurried up to the first floor. The aisles were clear. Darting toward the escalator, I ran up the now stationary steps to the second floor, and the men's department. I had timed things well; the guards would soon be locking the doors, and I would have to ask one to let me out, but in the meantime I had the second floor to myself.

Alvin was right; it would be easy. Someone would notice that the clothes were missing, but suspicion could hardly fall on me; the security guard would see that I was unencumbered. I went to the suits, selected a three-piece number in gray wool, and took out my shrinker.

I had charged it up before leaving; it could be used only five times. I held up the suit, shrank it, and put it in my purse. Going to coats, I pulled out a London Fog, then went to shirts, pulled

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out a few, and shrank the lot. It was child's play; I had been right about the temptation. I was becoming a thief, and would soon look for bigger heists. I considered the possibilities—Brink's trucks, jewelry stores, art galleries—there was no limit, and we could easily hide the stolen goods. We would be rich. If the police came after us, we could shrink them.

I almost laughed out loud. The world was ours; Alvin and I could be the biggest people in it. I was exasperated with myself for worrying so much, wasting time in self-pity when I could have been building a fat nest egg.

I had three beams of power left. I pulled out three pairs of jeans, selected three ties and some cufflinks, and aimed the shrinker. The beam shot out and the clothes contracted with a slight pop. I pushed the button, and the lever clicked up.

"Hey!"

I gasped, almost dropping the shrinker. Harley Stein of appliances was at the far end of the aisle, striding toward me from the elevator. I almost panicked, but managed to stay calm enough to scoop up the tiny clothes and stuff them into my coat pocket before he came closer.

I struggled with my purse, trying to conceal the shrinker, as Harley came up to me. "You're here late, Jessie—you lose something, too?"

"Yeah." I was wrestling with the shrinker, which refused to go into my purse. "Er, I thought I lost an earring up here."

"Did you find it?"

"No." I was flustered, and could feel my face turning red.

"What is that? A laser toy or something?" He had seen the beam. I stepped back. "Let me see it."

"Oh, you don't want to see it, Harley. It's only a toy." I held the shrinker to my chest, ready to run.

"Come on." He grinned his boyish smile. "That beam was cool. What is it, one of those Star Trek jobs?" He grabbed the shrinker, pulling it out of my hands. "Fire photon torpedoes." He waved it around while I ducked from side to side, fearful of an accidental shot.

"Give it back."

He went into a crouch. "Klingon approaching. Beam me up, Scotty. Show me how it works."

"Damn it, Harley, give it back." I seized the shrinker and pulled too hard; one side hit my arm, releasing the switch.

The beam struck Harley and he shrank; there was a pop and

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he was suddenly a tiny little man, a bit shorter than Alvin, but then Harley was only five six.

Somehow, I kept my wits. Aiming the shrinker, I lifted the switch, and Harley stood before me again, back to his normal size. He was very pale; his moustache twitched as he sagged toward me. I caught him with one arm while managing to put the shrinker into my purse with the other. I had used all its stored power, and it was now harmless.

"Whooo," Harley said. "You'll never believe it. You and the whole store suddenly expanded. Whoo. I'm going nuts."

"I'll help you downstairs."

"Whoo." He wiped his face with one sleeve. "It must have been an acid flash. I thought they went away after a while—I haven't done any dope in years, not even grass." He clung to my arm. "Maybe you could call me a cab—I'm afraid to drive home."

"You and your clothes," I said, dropping the load inside Alvin's fence. "You don't know what a close call I had." I told him the story. "What if I hadn't had enough power to enlarge him again? I was already down to my last two beams." I shook as I thought of it, and had to sit down.

Alvin came out of the house and picked through the clothes. "Nice stuff." He stood up. "But you didn't get the underwear."

"The hell with the underwear." Alvin covered his ears. "Enlarging Harley was more important. I'll buy you some underwear. I'm never going through that again."

He cupped his hands. "Stop hollering. And don't panic. It was a fluke that Harley was there late. You'll do better next time."

"There isn't going to be a next time. I'm not going to listen to you any more, you and your dumb ideas. I've been listening to you too long." My resentments poured from me; I had been holding them back too long. "I work at a crummy job all day so you can write, and all you do is run up bills and then shrink yourself. And now you've got me stealing for you. I won't do it any more. I'm sick of catering to you and your book, I'm sick of emptying your toilet and cleaning up after you. I'm just about ready for a divorce, if you want to know. I'm sure I'd get one, too. Having a husband five inches tall has to be grounds."

"You're being irrational," he piped.

"I'm not irrational." I jumped to my feet. "You are."

"Shut up and listen to me. I finally have a good plan, and you won't back me up."

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"No! I don't have to listen to you now—I'm bigger than you." I waved my arms wildly. "You can go to hell."

"Jessie, will you calm down?" He shook a tiny fist at me. "You're getting all worked up. You don't know how ugly that big pan of yours looks."

"I don't care!" And with those words, I brought my fist down on the dresser.

I stared at my hand in horror, unable to move. "Alvin? Alvin?" What had I done? The space in front of the dollhouse was empty, my tiny husband downed with one blow. I couldn't bring myself to lift my arm and view the crushed and mangled body. I was a murderer. I would go to the police and confess. Maybe I would be shrunk and forced to do time in a tiny prison with other little inmates. It would be a fitting punishment, and the authorities would at last have a way to deal with the shortage of prison space. I no longer cared what happened to the rest of the world.

During these ruminations, I gradually became aware that I could feel nothing under my fist. Slowly, I lifted my hand. Alvin's body wasn't there.

"Alvin?" I whimpered.

The sofa inside the living room moved, and he peered out over the top. Somehow he had dodged my fist and made for the house. He stood up and tilted his head to one side.

"I'm plugging in that shrinker," I said, "and then I'm enlarging you whether you want it or not."

This time, he didn't argue with me.

When Alvin had finished his book, we went out to the country, driving along dirt roads until we came to an empty piece of land.

Alvin took out the box. He carried it into the field while I followed with a shovel. He set down the box and I opened it.

We had taken the shrinker apart; only small pieces and fragments were left. We buried the pieces in separate spots; they would not be found for a long time, and I doubted that anyone could put them back together again.

As we walked back to the car, Alvin said, "Do you mind?"

I thought of our bills and all the riches we would never be able to steal. "I mind a little. I'm not going to say I don't."

"I could always make a book out of it. A novel about the little guy."

I said, "I think it's already been done." ●

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VIEWPOINT

IN DEFENSE OF THE REAL WORLD

by Charles Platt

What you are about to read may make some of you angry; it's likely that it will make an equal number of you stand up and cheer. Whatever your reaction, we ask you to please hold your comments until you've read Piers Anthony's rebuttal in the next issue. After that, however, your comments are sincerely requested. If the response warrants it, extracts of these comments may be published as a separate Viewpoint in a future issue. With that caveat in mind—read on!

Val Lakey Lindahn/ Artifact

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VIEWPOINT

Once upon a time there were no dragons. At least, not in books for grown-ups. Dragons were kept hidden away in a few old fairy tales, and some children's books—where they belonged.

But then something very strange happened. Grown-up people started writing books about dragons, for other grown-up people to read. And not only dragons—soon there were all kinds of funny, cute little creatures, like fairies, and wizards, and unicorns, and talking rabbits. Grown-up people reading books about *talking rabbits?* It seemed impossible. But that's what was happening.

This made some people very angry. These people were the *science fiction writers*. Science fiction and fantasy may sound much the same kind of thing to you, but of course they are not. Fantasy never tries to be anything more than let's-pretend, while science fiction is supposed to be about things that might actually happen someday.

When the fantasy started outselling the science fiction, because people wanted to read about magic instead of super-science, the science fiction writers got very upset about it. They said that playing let's-pretend was surely a whole lot of fun, but you had to grow up some time, and face the future. Otherwise, you'd be hit with who-knows-what, and you wouldn't know how to cope with it.

But did the fantasy fans take any notice of this? No! They just said "Stop being so pretentious and boring! Science fiction is mostly fantasy anyway; why not admit it? And fiction is for having fun. When we want to know about science, we'll read *Scientific American.*" (Not that they ever did.)

Some of the younger science-fiction writers, who wanted to be successful and were a bit lazy, decided to "compromise." They started writing science fiction which wasn't really logical and didn't really have any proper science in it and took place so far in the future, or on planets

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so far away, almost anything could happen—just like in fantasy.

Some of the older writers got wise to this, and complained about it—but no one paid much attention. By this time, there were so few readers or editors who understood science, hardly anyone could tell the difference between a spaceship that really would work, and a spaceship that was only let's-pretend. Anyway, what did it matter?

So, in the end, most science fiction writers gave up and started doing the fantasy-flavored stuff. After all, it was a whole lot easier, because you didn't have to worry about getting your facts right.

A few writers refused to change, but pretty soon they got old and died, or just faded away. And that's why there's no more real science fiction. That's why it's all about other worlds that are simple, and are safe, because they can't come true. Worlds of princesses and magicians and gnomes and goblins and, yes, dragons.

It hasn't reached this stage yet, of course. It isn't even necessary for me to write this entire article in kiddiespeak (although that's a style that seems to have a real future, cropping up everywhere from TV commercials to computer instruction guides, as if people really prefer to be talked down to, these days). For the time being, science fiction survives, along with intelligent discourse, and the dragons haven't taken over.

But as one of those old-fashioned folk who thinks the difference between fantasy and science fiction really is important, I'm horrified at the changes in reading habits that I've seen in the past fifteen years. I'm disgusted by an audience that now seeks nothing but reassurance, as if to deny the hard facts of the real world.

Let us go back, for a moment, to that mysterious time before the dragons. Back to the year of, say, 1960, which was when I started reading science fiction myself.

At that time, there was no separate category for fantasy.

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VIEWPOINT

Conan was out of print. There were a few Edgar Rice Burroughs novels still around, but they didn't do very well. Some magazines, such as *Fantastic*, had a fantasy flavor, but they stopped short of wizards and demons and all the whimsical stuff, and dealt more with "Twilight Zone" type of material—unexplained weird things happening in everyday life. None of them was as successful or as enduring as the science fiction publications.

Of course, science fiction itself was a small field in those days, and a pulpy one. No big-budget movies, no best-selling paperbacks. Slime dripped, rockets flamed, and women struggled in the clutches of disgusting alien *things*. You had to be brave to read it, because everyone laughed at you. "Kid stuff," they said, and of course they were right—most of it was aimed at kids, and it was just one level above comics. No one taught it in colleges; that would have been unthinkable.

However, there were some diehard fans who took science fiction very seriously indeed. They ignored the lurid covers, they endured the ridicule of their friends, and they searched through hundreds of juvenile adventures in order to find the few, rare books that had *ideas*. Generally, these ideas were about science and the future, and they seemed very important, because the diehard fans believed in the promise of technology, in space travel, computers, satellites—maybe even telepathy, if it could be tested properly. (Diehard fans were loyal to the scientific method.)

These fans had a Special Faith in science fiction as a window into the future. Of course, they also used it as an escape—it was, after all, full of super-powered heroes doing heroic deeds. But the ideas tied the fiction to reality, because the ideas which came from the good writers were theoretically feasible. They really could all come true.

That was how it was then. Cheap, sleazy, but often intelligent. Within the next twenty years, it was to become big-business, socially acceptable, and mostly stupid.

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The real world, which had seemed so simple and predictable in the 1950s, became turbulent in the 1960s. The Kennedy assassinations, the missile gap, overpopulation, ecology, Vietnam, urban crime, riots, youth culture—there were so many social and technological changes, the *idea* of change became more plausible to the general public. And the manned missions finally proved the feasibility of space travel. Coincidentally, popular culture became a legitimate theme in art and academia, and Stanley Kubrick made the first big-budget science fiction movie. All of this helped science fiction to become a little more respectable and attract some new readers.

But a much more important factor was the sudden availability of tabs of acid on every college campus. Today, acid trips sound vaguely old-fashioned and irrelevant, but back then, you never knew which of your friends was going to take a trip and See God. And be serious about it.

Even people who didn't mess around with drugs couldn't avoid the new notion that there might be *other realities*, accessible via mushrooms, mantras, macrobiotics, or whatever. At the very least, it seemed that we all ought to take a whole lot of new ideas more seriously, as valid alternatives. "Alternative" was in fact a vogue word: alternative education, medicine, culture.

And so, in that strange time of student riots, political uncertainty, and widespread drug-use, people were suddenly willing to believe almost anything. UFOs, mind control, acupuncture, cosmic consciousness, meditation, astrology, zen, and cults of all kinds.

A few science-fiction novels fit right into this scheme of things. They could be used like drugs and music: as something to get off on. A head trip. No one laughed at you for reading them, any more than they laughed at you for giving all your money to an Indian mystic who promised to show you the

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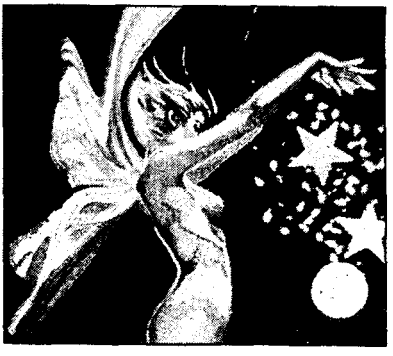
inner light by telling you your mantra.

The new kind of reader who "got high on sci-fi" was very different from the old kind with the Special Faith in the technological future. Those old diehard fans certainly had their limitations—they tended to be social misfits, weirdos, nerdish types with bad breath and acne, who weren't much fun at parties. But at least they knew the difference between astrology and astronomy. They were rational. They demanded science fiction with ideas that made good sense.

The new dope-using hippie-type readers were much less discriminate—to them, telepathic houseplants were no less plausible than manned spaceflight to Mars. The details weren't important. Whether it was all going to come true wasn't important. What mattered was, could you get off on it while stoned and listening to the Grateful Dead on stereo headphones. And so, we began to see a new, growing demand for science fiction stories that didn't have to make sense. Rationality



"The fantasy that sold best was not only irrational, it was formularized and repetitive. Its defenders claimed it was the freest form of literature, and yet there were no surprises. Again and again, Good vanquished Evil, heroes rescued princesses, and warriors ousted usurpers from the throne."

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and intellect and the scientific method were no longer necessary.

This explains why the first science fiction novels that became best-sellers were such a peculiar pair. One was *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein, a long saga of a "sinless" man, born on Mars and raised by Martians, who comes to Earth, develops super-powers, forms a free-love cult, and discorporates—i.e., murders—anyone who interferes with his freedom. The other was *Dune*, by Frank Herbert, a long saga of a desert planet in a far-off star system, where a messiah leads his people to prepare for the coming of the rains.

Neither of these books was successful at first. Heinlein's was in print for years before it matched the mood of the times, and Herbert had trouble selling *Dune*. Heinlein's novel wasn't even one of his best. He had written many other books that were much better paced, with meatier, more rational ideas. (In fact many NASA engineers had grown up reading Heinlein, who, more than any other writer, had fostered the Special Faith.) Many Heinlein fans actively hated *Stranger in a Strange Land*. There wasn't any real speculation in it, just a feeble premise and a lot of waffle about sex and politics.

Ah, but the waffle was what the new readers liked best. All those half-baked ideas about free love and a new religious order, with a cult figure who defends his little world—his own alternative society—by offing the fascist pigs with mind-zapping telepathic powers. *Far out*, as we used to say.

Likewise, *Dune*: a messiah, a group of followers, a land of strange creatures and rituals, far, far away, like an acid trip. And it just happened to be the *longest* science fiction novel around. Long books, like trilogies, postpone the moment when you have to turn the final page, come down from the high, take off the headphones, and face dull old reality.

Many science-fiction editors couldn't understand why these books by Heinlein and

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VIEWPOINT

Herbert were selling so well. The editors themselves had started out as diehard fans who grew up with the Special Faith, and they saw science fiction in those terms. Even when they published the simplest adventures, they checked the plausibility and scientific accuracy. They really cared about that kind of thing.

And so they thought the increasing sales of science fiction must be entirely the result of the Apollo program, putting men on the Moon. In this way, for several years, the editors were actually out of sync with their new, enlarged readership. Once in a while, almost by accident, tastes happened to coincide, and a book or series would suddenly sell a lot of copies—as Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld* series did. The rest of the time, science fiction fell far short of best-seller status.

Meanwhile, what of fantasy? The 1960s had already produced the first fantasy best-seller: *Lord of the Rings*. This, too, puzzled a lot of publishing people. With its whimsical but stuffy style, it resembled a children's story told by an old British uncle. It was cute, of course—so cute that some people started naming their pets, and even their children, after the hobbits. But why should Tolkien capture the public imagination on such a grand scale?

Because, like Heinlein and Herbert, he built a complete and separate alternate reality. His world was slightly surreal and full of pretty colors, like an acid trip. Yes, you could get off on it. Why else did so many head shops sell blacklight posters of Middle Earth?

Some time passed before other publishers seriously started imitating Tolkien. This was partly because the only editors who seemed qualified to deal with fantasy were the science fiction editors, and most of them preferred to publish science fiction, since that was what they enjoyed and understood. Tentatively, they dabbled with Conan and various other sword-and-sorcery series. Finally, rather grudgingly,

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they realized the extent of the potential readership for this kind of thing.

The first paperback editors to establish a new, separate category for fantasy were Judy-Lynn and Lester del Rey, of Del Rey Books. They began scoring their successes around the time of *Star Wars*. That movie helped to recruit the next big wave of science fiction readers who had no special interest in science, had no Special Faith in the tenchological future, and were really more interested in fantasy. The movie itself was fundamentally fantasy, with none of the logic, the extrapolation, or the relevance of real science fiction. It used science-fictional gadgets, but only for effect, like magic amulets. None of the technology or social background was explained. The story was of a princess, a wise old wizard, sword fights, and a young hero who pushed aside the computerized bombsight at the climactic moment, because he'd rather go with the flow of the Force. A clear victory for superstition over science, and if audiences found nothing strange in this, this showed how far rationality had fallen out of fashion.

Most other so-called science-fiction movies of the 1970s were as full of fantasy, and equally anti-science. *Close Encounters* was an acid-head story—the tale of a man who abandoned his wife and children for a mystical "higher reality" (i.e. pretty-colored lights in the sky). The movie did feature a scientist, but he was a crank. Few real scientists, and virtually no science fiction writers, take UFOs seriously—they find the evidence unconvincing.

The Andromeda Strain used some authentic science, but condemned scientists as bunglers. Likewise, *The China Syndrome*. In *Soylent Green*, Harry Harrison's meticulous novel, *Make Room! Make Room!*, was reduced to an implausible joke. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* was impressively artistic, but used science fiction as a convenience, not as a system for interpreting the future. *Superman* made no more

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attempt than the comic ever did to explain its gimmickry in rational terms. Likewise, *Star Trek,* which paid lip-service to the scientific method, but never made much rational sense. (But then, neither had the TV series.)

Throughout the 1970s, these movies served as advertisements for science fiction, recruiting more and more new readers. But the movies were silly, feeble imitations of real science fiction, and so they attracted people who cared more for fantasy than for facts. The only honorable, careful, intelligent science fiction movie had been Kubrick's *2001*; and even that contained some fantasy-appeal, in its "trip" sequence at the end, best seen while stoned.

Little wonder, then, that when fantasy novels were introduced as a separate category in the second half of the 1970s, they started selling beyond the editors' expectations. These were the books that the new readers had wanted all along—books about alternative realities, cute creatures, and all the rest of it, *without any of that tiresome scientific stuff.* Throw out the meticulously visualized, biologically feasible alien life forms. Bring on the dragons. Throw out the rationality; bring on the whimsy, the magic, and the superstition.

Worse still, the fantasy that sold best was not only irrational, it was formularized and repetitive. Its defenders claimed it was the freest form of literature, of pure imagination; and yet, there were no surprises. Again and again, Good vanquished Evil, heroes rescued princesses, and warriors ousted usurpers from thrones. When a writer wanted a new idea, he didn't search his own imagination, but went back and plundered old myths. And the swordsman *never* lost, the quest *never* failed. Evidently, fantasy readers preferred things this way.

In this respect they were different from the hippie-type readers of the late 1960s. Though gullible and indiscriminate, they had at

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least been open to all kinds of weird ideas—after all, it was a time of experimentation generally, in music, art, drugs, and life styles. So there were experiments in science fiction: kinky sex, weirdo characters, humor, all kinds of twists that might not make much rational sense, but were at least *new*.

No more. Expanded consciousness was out; contracted consciousness was more the mode of the 1970s. By which I mean, deliberately excluding anything the slightest bit unpredictable or disturbing. Wild social optimism had given way to apathy in the face of problems that had failed to yield to slogans and blind faith. One look at the morning newspaper provided more than enough surprises for most readers; in fiction, they now seemed to want repetition and reassurance. Hence, the hero who always wins, the magic that never fails, the princess whose beauty is flawless, the swordsman who never knows the meaning of pessimism or self-doubt.

And, as of now, this is the

Photo: Jay Kay Klein

"... Modern fantasy could be entirely written by hermits buried underground. There is no social observation, no link with the everyday.... By eliminating from their stories anything more modern than a flintlock pistol, the writers evoke a dishonestly simplistic nostalgia for primitivism."

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state of the art.

The old diehard fans of science fiction are not yet extinct; some of them still keep the Special Faith. These days, they believe in space colonies, or space industrialization; some of them belong to activist groups advocating these goals, such as the L5 society.

But their fiction is in decline. Not many writers will still take the trouble to devise a novel properly, predictively, getting all the facts right. Generally speaking, there's no money in getting all the facts right. The big market now is for fiction in which facts don't exist.

Moreover, there are hordes of new readers who not only don't care about technology, but are hostile to it: simple souls to whom "no nukes" means not just a ban on nuclear weapons, but rejection of all forms of nuclear power, regardless of differing degrees of safety. These scared children in adult bodies want let's-pretend worlds where there is no science at all. For them, we have the little people, the cute creatures, and the dragons.

I am not condemning all fantasy. After all, in its broadest sense, "fantasy" includes almost all literature. What I am picking on, as a symptom of apathy and cowardice, is the modern category of fantasy which now outsells science fiction and has polluted science fiction with its antirationalism.

I am talking about books of swordplay, such as the Conan series; books of good magic versus bad; books about endearing mythical beasts.

These modern fantasy novels are seldom written in modern prose, since that would spoil their attempt to create alternate worlds cut off from the here-and-now. Rather, the writing is laden with absurd excesses of whimsy and sentiment—the "lyrical" school. Or it's quaint and mannered, littered with words like *thee* and *thou* and *methinks*—the "medieval" school. Either way, it's clumsy and overdone.

A few authors manage to avoid the worst of these cliches of style and content. In particular, Piers Anthony

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writes in a Lewis Carroll tradition, borrowing relatively little from the usual myths, and inventing some of his own. If nothing else, Anthony's novels enlarge the vocabulary of his younger readers.

But they won't tell these readers anything applicable to real life. Nor will any other modern fantasy.

I emphasize again, I'm referring strictly to that effluvium of paperbacks, since around 1975, with the word "FANTASY" printed on their covers. I'm not complaining about the older, venerable fantasists, such as Poe, or even Lovecraft, or the stories that Verne and Wells wrote when they weren't doing science fiction. Almost all of this older school of fantasy is anchored in some way in the reality of the time in which it was written. It depicts everyday people, suffering everyday problems, and there's a vivid sense of the author being intimately connected with his surroundings.

By contrast, modern fantasy could be entirely written by hermits buried underground. There is no social observation, no link with the everyday. By borrowing Arthurian legends or other centuries-old myths as their subject matter, the writers turn the clock back to a time when science did not exist, and superstition held sway. By eliminating from their stories anything more modern than a flintlock pistol, the writers evoke a dishonestly simplistic nostalgia for primitivism. By stripping character down to caricatures of good and evil, the writers get rid of ambiguity, subtlety, and doubt. What could be more reassuring? What could be more irrelevant?

There is always a need for pure entertainment, and I'm not suggesting that readers should be faced constantly with grim dilemmas in fiction as in life. All I'm saying is that the balance has shifted much too far in the opposite direction, to the point where escapism in its purest, most complete form has displaced other forms of literature that had something more intelligent and worthwhile to

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offer.

On television, at the movies, and in books, the American public is being bombarded with kiddiespeak, encouraged to think and act as children. Characters display childish motives; they crave immediate, selfish gratification, pure pleasure, freedom from responsibility. The techniques are equally childish: repetitive prose, predictable plots, simplistic solutions, all taking place in never-never land.

We have reached this nadir of creativity at a time when it is especially important for us to confront and care about our future and each other. But a retreat into infantile gratification is all that fantasy offers, and every book or film that says "let's pretend" displaces some other form of art (almost always a higher form). Every success of a totally formularized writer encourages editors to believe that there is no market left for serious fiction. Every author who gets lazy and falls into the easy habit of inventing everything, instead of using facts plugged into reality, encourages other writers to do the same.

Modern fantasy is more than merely an insult to reading tastes and intelligence. By seducing young people into a superstitious denial of rationality, it undermines the world we live in. Our society is too complex, too fragile for us simply to reject technology. Technology, humanely applied, is our only hope for survival. We need to restore that Special Faith; we need more people who believe in confronting problems intelligently, rather than retreating from them.

But so long as vast numbers of young readers are tempted into dumb worlds of demons and dragons, we will have exactly the opposite of what we need. ●

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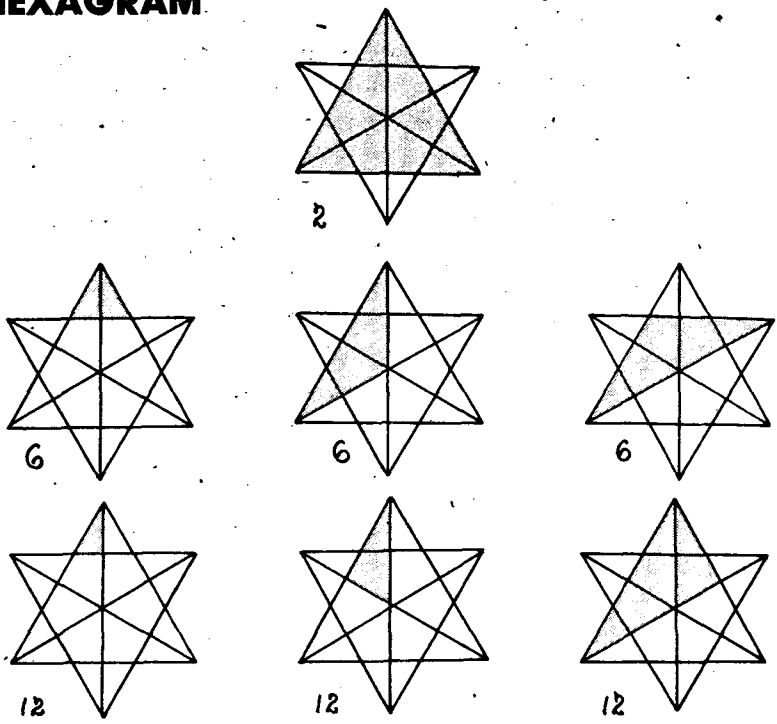
(From page 28)

SOLUTION TO THE DYBBUK AND THE HEXAGRAM



There are 56 triangles. Shown here are the seven kinds, and the number of each. If you enjoyed working on this task, you might try a much more difficult one: counting the number of quadrilaterals in the diagram, including "crossed quadrilaterals" that have a pair of intersecting sides. I don't know the answer, and would welcome hearing from readers who make the count. I can't reply to letters, but I'll report on the correspondence about five months from now.

For word-play buffs, can you rearrange the letters of FURICLE to discover why I gave my cat that name? The answer is on page 89.

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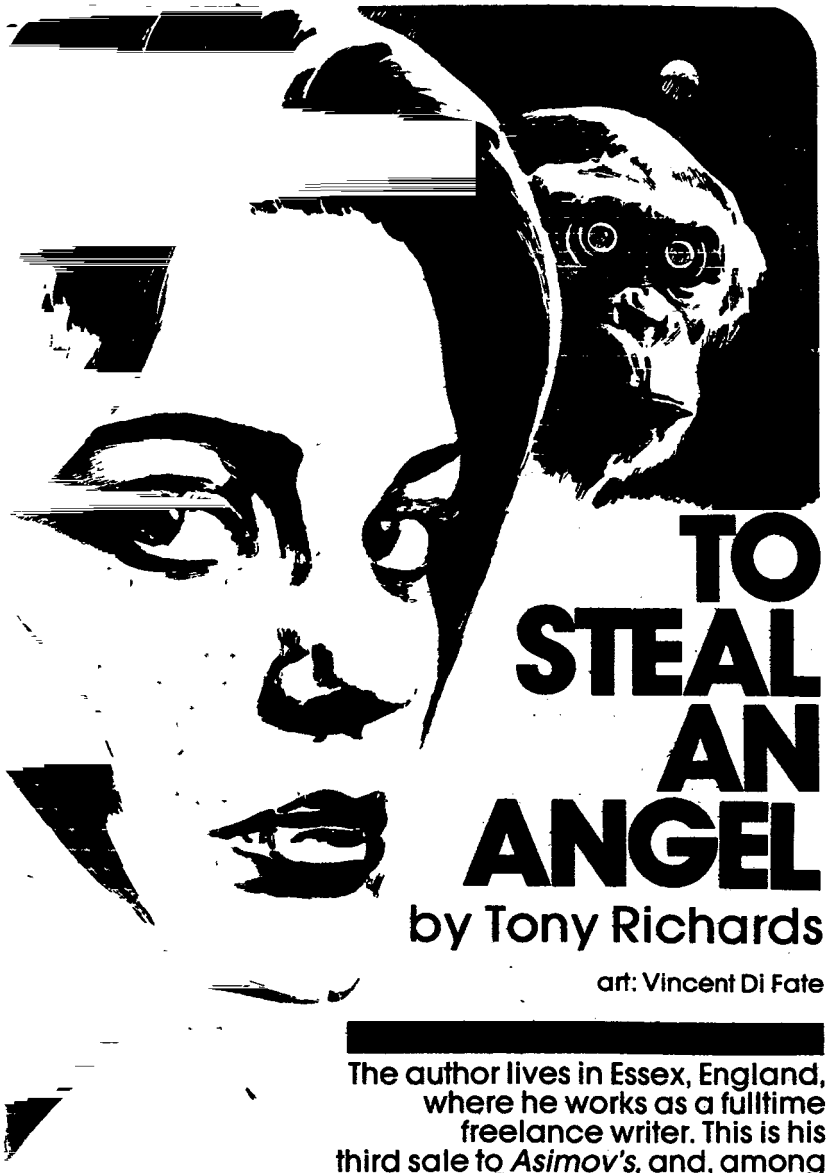

TO STEAL AN ANGEL

by Tony Richards

art: Vincent Di Fate

The author lives in Essex, England, where he works as a fulltime freelance writer. This is his third sale to *Asimov's,* and, among other projects, he says he's about to leave for Istanbul at the end of the month. He does not say why, however,

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They are large and white-furred and yellow-eyed. There are eighteen of them in the tribe, and they huddle together for warmth beneath a rocky, snow-clad overhang near the peak of the purple mountain, and from there they survey their world. Below them lies the forest, delicate turquoise beneath a huge red sun, an almost purple sky. Beyond the forest lie the rivers and the hills and the plains, and on the plains is the village where the aliens live who came here in their shell so long ago. There are signs of activity down there. A trail of smoke rises against the lilac sky.

The tribe yawn and groom each other with long, shaggy arms. They are not inquisitive creatures. They are simply waiting for the thaw to come.

And suddenly three wingedthings flutter into view, tiny, pale, beating so furiously at the air that they seem to be surrounded by a crystal nimbus. The chief of the tribe bows his head, and the leading wingedthing settles on it just below the occipital ridge.

It rests there for three minutes before going aloft again. Immediately afterward, the chief gets to his feet and, chivvying the tribe to do likewise, begins to lead them out of this part of the mountains to the east.

The wingedthings wait, hovering, until the tribe is gone. Then two of them fly off to find another tribe. The last, the smallest, stays behind, staring at the village far below. It knows curiosity where the white-furred ones do not. It hesitates a moment, then skims down into the turquoise forest to take a closer look.

"Witch, witch, witch, witch." The word rang over and over in Elisa's mind as she went into the turquoise forest. "Witch, witch, *witch*!" She stumbled against the bole of an ancient blueoak, leaned against it trembling and panting. Her entire scalp was prickling. The sweat on her face, her shoulders, hands, was growing cold and uncomfortable in the icy winter air; her clothes were sticking to her body. "*WITCH!*"

She closed her eyes and pressed her head against the treetrunk until the trembling had passed. Then, once she was calm again, she brushed her raven hair out of her face and glanced back the way she had come, ascertaining that none of the villagers had followed her. Of course they hadn't. They all believed that the forest was inhabited by evil spirits, and it was precisely because of that, since no one else came near the place, that Elisa sought solitude here. Yes, there was the occasional pack of *wulfras* to beware of, and groundsnakes presented some danger, but Elisa did not believe in spirits, evil or otherwise.

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She straightened out her clothes as best she could and pressed farther into the blue-green shadows.

The wind, from the north, caught her coarse gray cloak and her long black hair and snagged it against twigs and shrubs. It caught her misted breath and dispersed it. It moaned through the forest, shook the tops of the trees, and it seemed to flow over Elisa like an invisible, chill river, scouring the dirt of everyday life from her body, cleansing confusion from her mind. After a while, she was able to look back on what had happened in the village with perfect, dispassionate clarity, analyze it all.

She had been going to the well to fetch fresh water. Gorth had stepped out to block her way, hands on massive hips, eyes strangely aflame beneath his mop of curly hair.

"Good mornrise, Elisa," he said, almost laughing, knowing that she would not dare to back away. "And how is our solitary young maiden today?"

"Very well, thank you, My Lord Gorth." She ducked her head in a minimal gesture of deference. "I was just on my way to the well—"

"To fetch water for yourself," Gorth broke in. "Ah, what a lonely task that must be, Elisa, to provide for yourself and no other."

"It suits my own nature, My Lord."

Gorth's expression became grave. He pulled back his shoulder, and the Key To The Book, hung round his neck by a leather thong, quivered in the sunlight. "It is not the will of Senkon, girl, that a young woman of eligible age should dwell on her own with no husband. You speak of *nature* on your part; it is not nature but perversity."

"No one would have me. They fear me, My Lord." She became aware that a crowd had gathered. Deliberately, she raised her voice. "Besides, I find the men of the village dull."

"Ha! And do you find *me* dull, Elisa?" His eyes burned brighter now, and his tone was peculiar. Elisa felt herself begin to shake.

"You already have a wife, My Lord. Semest. She bears your child."

"It is our tradition, Elisa, that the Headsman may take himself more than one wife."

Elisa stared at her boots and said evenly, "It is also our tradition that the Headsman must obtain the consent of the bride's father."

"Are you mocking me, girl?" Gorth shouted.

Elisa's parents had both died of the choking sickness two years ago, when she was fourteen.

"Are you *mocking* me?" Gorth repeated. He snatched for the

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front of her cloak. At once, Elisa dropped her empty pail and raised her right hand in the sign of the evil eye. She heard a gasp from the villagers around her. Gorth shuddered and pulled back. His face was turning an unusual shade of red.

"Fool!" he hissed, his voice shaking. "Little *fool!*"

He had turned and stamped away. And Elisa had run through the alleys between the mud huts, the cries of the villagers on her heels, and kept on running until she had reached the safety of the forest.

Now she reflected that Gorth had been right, at least in his last angry statement. She *was* a fool. To be different from all the other villagers, so different that they branded her a witch, was bad enough. To compound it by defying the village Headsman, the holy Keeper Of The Book, was pure insanity.

The Book! The Book! If only she could have a chance to read it! All things were explained in The Book.

She was broken out of her reverie by a sudden rustling in the bushes alongside her, a sudden sharp, sibilant noise. She had jumped back, suspecting a groundsnake, when she realized that the rustling was feeble and the other sound was not a hiss but the buzz of a tiny wing. An injured bird, perhaps. Elisa crept forward, parted the bushes cautiously.

And there it was, the angel. A tiny man, six inches long, with wings like striated glass. It was completely hairless, and its golden globes of eyes seemed to devour its head. An angel.

It was trapped, struggling, in an arak web, and even as Elisa watched, a large, ten-legged shape began to crawl out of the shadows in the corner of the bush. She hesitated. Angels were to be feared; that was how the teachings in the village went. Angels stole the souls of good Senkon-fearing people and took them to the mountain where the demon snow-apes dwelt. And though Elisa found it hard to believe such stories, though she empathized with the tiny creature so near to its death, she found that sixteen years of religion were hard to cast aside. Invisible spirits were one thing; an actual soul-stealer, close enough to touch, was quite another.

It was almost over before she moved. The angel's flutterings had risen to a frantic whine, and the arak had raised itself on its front four legs to strike. A sudden, furious self-disgust swept Elisa, that she had allowed superstition to paralyze her so, and she snatched up a large stone from the ground and hurled it.

The arak tumbled from its web and limped away with two injured legs. The angel became still.

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She was afraid, at first, that the venomous bite had already been delivered. But the angel was watching her with those unreal golden eyes. It waited calmly while she untangled it from the web.

At last, she had it on the palm of her hand. It squatted comfortably there, fussing at a damaged wing, and Elisa was amazed at its lightness and its delicacy. She laughed when it tried to crawl up her arm.

"You're no soul-stealer," she smiled, replacing it on her palm. "You're just a creature, and a rather pretty one at that."

The angel buzzed its wings. Elisa inspected the injured one. "You can't fly, can you?" She wondered if the wing would heal. She imagined so, given time. Perhaps if she took it back . . .

The village was completely lost from sight. Nonetheless, Elisa glanced furtively around before tucking the angel under her gray cloak and setting off for home.

Her walk back to the village took her past forbidden ground. Here lay the remains of the ship in which the great god Senkon had sent them to this world. It was shattered, but the metal did not rust. Here also were the ninety-seven graves of those who had died on landfall, thus proving themselves unworthy of life on this holy world. Elisa had inspected both ship and graveyard dozens of times in the dead of night, but now she was careful to make a show of skirting them. There was no point in further upsetting the villagers.

The village itself came closer into view. It was no more than a ramshackle collection of thatched, mud-mortared huts crisscrossed by rutted alleys. Near the middle was the slightly larger hut which housed Gorth and his pregnant wife. And at the direct center was the worship mound, and on the mound, the altar of Senkon, made of the same rustless metal as the ship, from which it had been brought. The face of the altar was covered with button-sized protrusions, flashing lights. Elisa had seen similar objects inside the ship.

She made directly for her hut on the farthest outskirts of the village, but by now she was realizing that reaching safety would be harder than she'd thought. The same group of people who had watched her argument with Gorth were loitering in the nearby alleys; as they noticed her approaching, they spread out to block her way. There was a stone in each gnarled fist. And leading the angry group was the Widow Rogash, perhaps Elisa's oldest enemy.

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Elisa drew within a few yards of the crowd and stopped. She was greeted with contemptuous hisses.

"Hah, the witch has finally returned!" The Widow's disease-pocked face creased like ancient leather.

"I wish you no harm, Widow. Will you let me pass?"

But the Widow Rogash had not heard her, and the old woman's next words were addressed to the crowd. "She has been in the forest, consorting with her spirit friends. Now she returns to bring her curse upon this place. See how she humiliates our Headsman. See how she defies the laws."

"Gorth brings humiliation on himself," Elisa said. She was growing panicky now, not so much because of the villagers and their stones but because the angel, underneath her cloak, was struggling to get free.

Rogash spat out, "You are an enchantress, girl. You have our Headsman in your spell. I am wise to you, Elisa. My old eyes see through such tricks."

Elisa considered using the sign of the evil eye again. She had used it on Gorth because it was the only way to get rid of him. She could not chance it on the Widow. Instead, she began to walk forward. A score of arms came up, ready to unleash the stones.

Elisa's first amazed thought was, *By Senkon—they're actually going to do it!*

Then that thought was lost into confusion as the angel finally got free and hopped onto her shoulder, in full view of all the rest.

There was an astonished yell from the crowd. Most of the stones were dropped.

"An angel!" The Widow Rogash raised a trembling finger. "The witch has stolen an angel from the forest! It will steal our souls!"

The crowd began to drop back rapidly. Some at the rear simply turned and made for shelter.

"Witch!" the Widow screamed, scrambling to the safety of an alleyway. Elisa, realizing that the angel had just saved her life, pulled her thoughts together and began to run for her hut. She was only dimly aware of the creature clambering up her neck onto her head. "Witch, witch, witch!"

She was almost at the door, the Widow's screams still chasing her, when the angel nestled on her occipital ridge. Elisa's mind went blank—and then was filled with images. She saw a place in the far east of the mountains where the thaw had arrived early. She saw strange-shaped trees bearing lush-looking golden fruit. She saw a tribe of snow-apes feeding on them, and she saw that there was enough fruit for many tribes. And she knew, without

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understanding why, that she and all her own tribe would be welcome to join in.

It made no sense; she had no *tribe*; she had never seen such fruit before. It seemed as though she observed the scene through the eyes of another. Through the eyes of a snow-ape, perhaps. Somehow, she kept on running. Somehow, she reached her hut and bolted herself in. A stone, presumably hurled by the Widow Rogash, thudded against the outside of the door.

Sick and dizzy, Elisa slumped to her knees. Such strange thoughts, such weird images. Perhaps she was going mad. The angel had returned to her shoulder. She stroked it carefully with her left hand.

The afternoon was spent in a colorless daze. She did not eat or attend to her chores, and was only brought back to alertness, as evening fell, by the sound of the villagers gathering around the worship mound for evening prayer. She went to her window and watched. Everybody else was there, with Gorth and his wife standing a head above them by the altar. Semest took care to stare straight ahead and not to look at Elisa's hut. Gorth himself risked one glance, flushed, and returned to his duties. He began delivering a speech of praise to Senkon.

Tucked beneath his right arm was The Book. It had, like the altar, come from the ship, and it was sealed in a casket of the same strange metal. There was only one key. It belonged to the Headsman and was passed down from father to son, since only the Headsman was allowed to read the sacred text. The Book had been written by Senkon Himself, and described the nature of the universe and the purpose for which the people of the village had been placed there. Elisa burned with curiosity every time she saw it. And even curiosity, she knew, was tantamount to blasphemy.

"—and Senkon in His wisdom," Gorth was saying, "created us out of void, and he sent us to this world in the Ship that we might spend our days worshipping him, that we might live pure and simple lives."

Lives of ignorance and disease more like, Elisa seethed. She stared at the huddled congregation, at the sores and scabs and withered limbs. She thought of the famines when the harvest failed, of the three out of four infants who never lived out a year. There *had* to be something better. The only question was—*what?*

The entire village was chanting a prayer, using words that the founding fathers had used when they had first arrived. "*Senkon, Senkon, dieu rhee. Amarganse, Senkon. Khamen, Senkon. Khamen.*"

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Exhausted, Elisa retired to her straw bed, and, falling asleep immediately with the angel by her head, she dreamed of golden fruit and white-furred apes all night.

The next day it rained unceasingly. The frozen ground turned to an unpleasant mire, and those many without shoes ventured out at the risk of foot rot. Elisa remained in the hut all day, for reasons of more urgent safety. People stayed clear of her hut now, as though a barrier lay around it, uncrossable from both sides. She kept a small damp fire going in the center of the floor, cooked a plain meal, and tried to tempt the angel with her sparse variety of foods. It touched neither vegetable nor meat. Indeed, when she looked closer, she saw that it had no teeth. What *did* an angel eat? It did not appear to be hungry, at least, and its wing was on the mend.

She was preparing for bed early that night, out of boredom more than anything else, when there was a rap at the door. Only one person would come to her this late. Elisa pushed the bolt back and opened the door to reveal the Headsman's wife.

Semest stared at the angel on Elisa's shoulder nervously.

"Don't worry, it's only an animal. Come in."

Even so, Semest remained against the inside wall until Elisa had perched the angel on the far side of the room. Elisa smiled curiously at her. One year her elder, Semest so often looked a frightened child.

"I'm surprised you still visit me. What if Gorth or the others found out?"

"Gorth's drunk himself to sleep. And the others wouldn't dare to harm the Headsman's wife. At least," and she tried to smile back, "not while I'm carrying his child." She touched her swollen belly with that terrified anticipation usual in the village. Childbirth here was dangerous and often deadly.

"I'm glad you've come, anyway," Elisa said. "At least I have one friend."

"One friend will not help you, Elisa. They're all convinced you're evil. The flouting of the laws, the making of signs. And now—" she glanced quickly at the angel—"this."

"If they want to think I'm a witch, let them believe that. If it keeps them away from me . . ." She shrugged contemptuously.

"But why do you despise them so?"

"Because they make a prison of their minds. Because they will not look around them. They live in misery and hardship and believe that is the perfect way, that they are blessed, the only

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humans in the universe. Remember that fragment of map I found in the ship." She looked directly into Semest's eyes. "Remember how it showed the stars, and worlds around each star, and names, actual *names*, for each small world."

"Senkon put it there to test you," Semest said uncertainly.

"What if other people put it there? What if other people made the ship?"

"*Elisa!*"

"But *think*, Semest, of what those people must be like, to make a ship that sails between the stars. Think just how different their world must be."

"Sometimes I think you would destroy everything we know."

"Sometimes," Elisa replied, "I do not even believe in Senkon." Guilt overcame her as she saw how much she had upset Semest with that remark. She bowed her head. "Maybe they're right and I am a witch. Perhaps you shouldn't come here anymore."

She found herself trembling in the silence that followed. She had lost too much already in her life. If she lost Semest, she would surely go insane.

Semest stood as straight as she was able and said very quietly, "You are a good person, Elisa. One of the best people I know. I only want for you to forget this foolishness before it kills you."

"Before *they* kill me, you mean. I am not suicidal, only honest."

"Which is perhaps the same thing in this place. How much longer do you think Gorth's affection will protect you? Already, they are talking of defying him. And soon now he will have to choose between you and his people's confidence."

"You are concerned they will depose him."

"He is an idiot!" Semest snapped, sharply. "I'm concerned for *you*!"

Elisa smiled. "Perhaps," she mused, "I ought to let him marry me. At least, then, I might get a chance to look at The Book."

"Elisa, stop it! That is blasphemy!"

"Do you mean to say that in all the two years you've been married to Gorth you've never been tempted to take the smallest peek? At a book that explains life, that explains past, present and future, history and destiny? You've never even tried?" Semest's expression provided her answer. Elisa shook her head and sighed. "I'm sorry, I'm upsetting you again. I think you'd better go back home. I'm not good company tonight."

Semest tiptoed to the door. She was almost out before she turned and said, "Take care, Elisa. Remember what I told you."

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"I'll think about it—that much I can promise you. Take care yourself, Semest. And thank you."

She returned to the window to watch her friend go. As the small cloaked figure disappeared amongst the shadows, Elisa found herself full of remorse. She had treated Semest terribly, reeled her in and out like a startled fish, bounced ideas off her and —yes—almost delighted sometimes in shocking her. Was this the price of getting to the truth? And was the price too high?

Any price! Elisa grated to herself, bolstering her resolve. *Even the price of life itself!*

She turned away from the window. In the distance, the lights on the altar flashed blue, yellow, and green, forming patterns as incomprehensible as life itself.

Two days later, the angel was able to fly, unsteadily. It remained close to Elisa, hopping off her shoulder to return a moment later and press affectionately against her cheek. Elisa regarded it with a mixture of amusement and concern. First, it still had not eaten anything, though it had not lost weight and seemed unbothered by the fact. Second, its presence sometimes had a strange effect on her. Occasionally, when it was near her head, she would get another flash of those weird images of snow-apes, golden fruit. They filled her dreams, and when she awoke each morning, with the angel clinging to her hair, she felt peculiarly drained.

It was the stress that did it, not the angel, she decided. There were more important things to worry about.

Though she had barely been outside the hut for the past few days, she knew that the tension was rising, that an explosion was close. Gorth had wandered past a few times, loitering on the outskirts like a prowling *wulfra*. Each time, he had seemed to be expecting her to make some conciliatory sign; each time he had stormed away angry. And the villagers had taken to huddling in knots outside and staring wordlessly. The Widow Rogash, true to form, had almost made a vigil of it.

As Elisa went to the window that afternoon and pulled back the ragged curtain, she saw the Widow seated in her usual spot by the side of a hut some twoscore yards away. Normally her own gaze would have been grimly returned, but this day a patch of sunshine had broken through the wintery clouds and the old woman had fallen asleep in its warmth, head tucked against her crooked knees, her black shawl wrapped around her like a shroud.

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Elisa was just on the point of moving away when the angel left her shoulder and fluttered out of the window.

Immediately, she was panic-stricken. It had been her pet and her protection since she'd found it, and now she was afraid that it was leaving her forever. She watched helplessly as it zigzagged and flapped toward the Widow Rogash. It alighted delicately on the back of her head.

"Come *back*!"

A single swat of a hand and the angel would be dead. It seemed almost a miracle that Rogash had not woken yet. The angel pressed itself against her dry gray hair.

"Oh, Senkon, let it live!"

The Widow stirred. The angel hovered up and began recrossing the distance to the window. It reached its mistress's shoulder just in time. Elisa snapped the curtain shut.

"You could have been killed!" She fought to steady her breath. "Stupid creature."

The angel clambered up her neck onto her head and pressed against it.

"What are you doing?"

She reached to lift it free.

And, suddenly, her mind went blank again.

Images filled it. They were not of apes or fruit this time, and after a few moments Elisa knew for sure that she was seeing the thoughts of the Widow Rogash.

There were memories of times gone by. There was a face that might have been her husband's. There was the realization that her body was deserting her, that her bones were growing frail, her limbs arthritic, her eyes dim. There was bitterness at that. And hate. Such hate. Hatred of beauty, hatred of youth, hatred of women at the start of their lives. Hatred, especially, of Elisa.

These were all past and present and were blurred. What stood out clearly through them had not even happened yet—an image of the future, an emerging plan. It involved a group of people on a shadowy night, *this* night. They were to carry bundles of straw and a torch, and piling the straw up against Elisa's hut they were to set fire to it while she slept. The Widow Rogash planned to deal with Elisa once and for all.

There the images ended, and Elisa came back to consciousness with a start. Her dizziness this time was borne out of confusion. She looked round for the angel, saw that it was hovering a few yards to her left. She stared at it incredulously.

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It had brought the Widow's thoughts to her, just as it had brought the snow-apes' thoughts to her.

At last, she understood.

When they came, long after midnight, Elisa was waiting for them in the shadows of the alley leading to her hut. There were twenty of them, led by the Widow Rogash with a torch, and in its dim, guttering flame Elisa could see that most of them were already afraid. Elisa smiled. Fear was her only weapon now, and, with the prescience the angel lent her, she would use it to the full.

The tiny creature on her shoulder hummed. She stroked it carefully to calm it. *Patience. Patience.*

She waited until the Widow Rogash was a mere few yards away. Then, suddenly, she stepped out into view.

The column came to an abrupt halt. Faces were white in the glow of the torch, eyes wide and mouths open soundlessly. *It was impossible! How had she known?* The wizened hand holding the torch began to quiver.

"More tricks, Elisa?" the Widow asked, her voice choked both with fear and with frustration.

"More treachery, Widow?" Elisa replied. She directed her next smile not at the woman but her followers. They cowered, actually cowered, before it. "Did you seek to *surprise* the village witch? You underestimate my power."

"We could rush you now. We could burn you."

"I think that you would be alone." Elisa indicated the dumbstruck, rooted villagers, and when the Widow turned her head to look at them it was with the air of one who had already realized defeat. "Like small, scared children," Elisa continued, "they could just pluck up the courage to attack me while I slept. But now they meet me face-to-face—and they are suddenly no longer brave. It is late for children to be out. Go to your own beds." She threw her arms up. "*Go!*"

"Stay where you are," the Widow said. It was one last desperate attempt to regain her control. The villagers ignored her. They began slinking away until she was alone. She glared at Elisa with her tiny, flint-like eyes, the light from the failing torch casting dull ochre rivulets across her face. "There will be a next time," she hissed, "and, next time, we shall not fail."

She hurled the torch down at Elisa's feet and turned and stamped away.

"Good night, Widow," Elisa whispered softly.

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She knew that the old woman had been speaking the truth. This victory was probably her last.

She did not—could not—sleep that night. The following mid-morning she was sweeping the floor of the hut when Semest opened the door and slipped quickly in. It was Elisa's turn for astonishment.

"Semest, are you *mad*?" It's *daylight*."

"I don't think anybody saw me," Semest said. "Besides, I'm not staying long. I simply came to ask—what really *did* happen last night, Elisa?"

Slowly, Elisa set her broom aside against the wall. "They've been to Gorth?"

"The Widow Rogash was there first thing this morning. She wants him to take action. Elisa, how did you know the villagers were coming?"

"Would you believe me if I said the angel told me?"

"No, I don't think so."

Elisa indicated the freshly swept floor. "Sit down, Semest. I have to explain this to you. It won't take long. Just . . . sit." She waited till her troubled friend had lowered herself to the floor before she did the same. She crossed her legs, then took the angel from her shoulder and displayed it at arm's length. Her friend looked nervous. "Like I said, Semest, it is only a beast. But it's a very special kind of beast. You see," she began, "when I first brought the angel home, it touched my head and filled it with images of a thaw in the east, of snow-apes feeding on uncovered fruit. I didn't understand what was happening at first. But then, a few days later, the angel went to Rogash and it brought her own thoughts back to me. It *stole* them, if you like, and then transferred them to my head. Do you understand so far?"

Semest shook her head.

"Look, when the spring comes, new flowers appear. Right?"

"Yes, but—"

"And the flowers are cross-fertilized," Elisa broke in, "by winged insects which fly between them, feeding on the nectar, carrying the pollen on their legs."

"What has this got to do with the angel?" Semest asked.

"Don't you *see*? The snow-apes are the flowers, the angels are the insects. Except instead of pollen, they cross-fertilize *thoughts*. Imagine you have tiny tribes of snow-apes scattered all over the mountains. They are miles apart, separated by the terrain, so it's hard for them to communicate when one tribe discovers a surplus

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of food, or a large area of shelter, or an approaching danger. But the angels do it for them; the angels take those messages and transfer them to other tribes. Unconsciously, of course, just as the insects are unconscious of their role. They do it because they feed on the energy of thoughts. In that sense," and she smiled, "they really *do* steal people's souls."

"You're saying that the angel brought a tribe of snow-apes' thoughts to you?"

"Yes."

"And then it brought the Widow's thoughts? It really wasn't witchcraft?"

Elisa laughed. "No, it really wasn't witchcraft."

"Are you going to explain that to the villagers?"

"I can't see it will do much good. Can you?"

Semest looked at her sadly, almost pityingly. "Well you have to do *something*, Elisa. Gorth is backed into a corner. He's promised to give the Widow her reply by tomorrow's worshiptime. There *is* only one answer he can give. He'll order you stoned, or burned."

"Oh, Senkon!" Elisa lowered her head between her knees. "Why can't they just let me live?"

"Because your life is so at odds with theirs you terrify them. Save yourself, Elisa. Go to Gorth, beg his forgiveness publicly. Renounce this mystery and madness, this belief in worlds round stars. Marry Gorth, cleave to Senkon, promise to live a normal, righteous, sinless life. Perhaps they will believe you. You can *try*."

"I can't do that, Semest. You know I can't."

"But it's your only chance!"

When Elisa raised her head it was almost with a sense of cunning. Her eyes, puffy before, were burning very brightly. "No, you're wrong there. I think there might be one alternative." She stroked the angel thoughtfully. "The holy Book contains all knowledge of all things. Perhaps it might contain my salvation. Perhaps it might even prove me right."

"And how do you expect to read it? Do you really imagine Gorth will give you the Key?"

"I have," Elisa smiled, "my own key. Not to the Book itself, but to Gorth's head."

The angel, on her palm, buzzed softly. Semest stared at it and then back at Elisa's face. Aghast. Horrified.

She began getting to her feet. "You're mad! You can't *do* that!"

"Semest?"

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"You play games with us all!" The girl's horror had turned to fury. Spots of color stood out on her cheeks. "You frighten us, you trick us! Now you would tamper with our *minds*!"

Elisa gazed up at her, wanting to stand up and stop her, knowing it would do no good. At long last, she had gone too far. "I have no choice, Semest. At least, will you wish me luck?"

"I wish you peace, Elisa. I wish you sanity."

And she was gone, running, covering her belly with her hands as though to protect her unborn child from the evil in the hut.

Elisa remained seated on the floor a long while after that, those final harsh words and the slam of the door echoing over and over in her mind. Her thoughts were blurred and gray, confused. The whole thing was a nightmare. It was only when she returned to some form of distant consciousness that she realized she had been crying. Her hands were clasped around her knees now, and the angel had taken up a new perch, on her left shoulder. Save for the angel she was totally alone.

Evening fell. A few stars appeared, blazing, between the swelling clouds. At her dark window, Elisa stared out cautiously across the silent, sleeping village; then she let the curtain drop back into place and, nerves all brittle, took the angel from her shoulder and touched its head against her own. It had communicated to her at least twice—now, she tried to communicate to it, hoping it would understand. She presented a mental image of Gorth's hut, showing it in relation to the layout of the village. She pictured in her mind the windows through which entrance might be gained. Then, she showed the angel Gorth himself, pictured the Headsman asleep, concentrated on his head. She repeated the images again and again until her temples ached.

Finally, she took the angel to the window and released it into the cold night air. There was a faint, translucent blur as its wings caught the starlight. Then it was lost from sight.

Slowly, Elisa huddled down beneath the windowsill, her back pressed against the flaking wall, her head clasped in her hands. *What if the angel did not understand and returned to the mountains? What if, when it entered Gorth's hut, Semest was waiting there to kill it?* A thousand other awful possibilities ran through her head. And there was nothing she could do but wait.

She realized, some while later, that she had lost all sense of time. How long had the angel been gone? An hour? Two? She stood and looked out of the window once again. Some of the clouds had cleared, and by the position of the stars she could tell that

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it was midnight or thereabouts. There was no sign of the angel. She began to resign herself to failure.

She remained at the window, like a statue. Another hour passed. She went to her bed, lay on it a short while, then got up and paced the room. She felt sick. She was cold and trembling.

At last, she collapsed to her knees at the dead center of the hut.

There was the sound of humming wings outside the window.

Through a gap in the curtains, the angel came. It flew to her and landed on her shoulder, quite exhausted. Elisa realized that it had been flying in circles for hours, trying to find the right hut.

Gently she plucked it up and set it against her forehead.

Later, when she put it down, she was not sure whether to laugh or cry, the blend of irony and tragedy was that intense. Irony: Gorth had read The Book from cover to cover, thus imprinting each page on his memory, and yet he barely understood one word. Irony: The Book was not what it was claimed to be; it merely explained the ship, the history and the mission and the mechanical functions of the ship. Tragedy: it was all a mistake, the whole cursed village, the whole miserable existence—a mistake!

And, with the knowledge from The Book, Elisa saw that there was just one chance of putting that mistake right. She hunted around the hut for suitable tools, settled on two small, thin-bladed knives, and then, with the angel on her shoulder, crept out into the night toward the worship mound.

The lights on the altar were flashing their multicolored patterns, just as they had flashed them every day since Senkon had sent the people here. The power for those lights, Elisa understood now, was drawn from the sun. She studied the face of the altar. On the far right, set into the metal, was a smaller light glowing a fixed bright red. If she succeeded, that light would blink out.

She crept around to the back of the altar and felt along the metal until she found the near-invisible seam. Then, she set to work with the first knife, locating the catches which would release the—what was it called?—the *inspection panel*. The first two gave way easily. The third jammed, and as Elisa strained at it, her knife suddenly snapped.

The brittle, metallic crack resounded amongst the nearest huts.

Elisa froze, terrified. If she was caught now—it did not even bear thinking about. She waited until she was satisfied that the noise had awakened no one; then she returned to her work.

It was when the panel finally came free and she lowered it gently to the ground that she recognized her second problem. The

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starlight had aided her so far; of the interior of the subspace transmitter, however, all that she could make out was a shadowed maze of alloys and alien glass. She dared not light a torch. And even if she did, she wondered, would she be able to repair the machine? It all looked so tortuous up close.

The angel was half asleep on her shoulder. She took it and, tipping her head slightly forward, settled it on the back of her skull. Those stolen memories, Gorth's memories, filled her once again. She rifled through them until she found exactly what she needed—the circuit diagram of the subspace transmitter. It became part of her, a bright, enormous map that dominated every facet of her consciousness. Now, she realized, she would know her way around the transmitter blindfolded.

Fifteen minutes later the small red light blinked out. A tube had jiggled out of place and had to be reset, as had two solid-circuit plates. That was all; there had been no irreparable damage. Elisa stood at the front of the altar, the angel still clinging to her head, and pressed the button that opened transmission. The lights changed their patterns, became predominantly green.

She became suddenly, stupidly aware that she did not know what to say. "My name," she began, moving her face near to the circular grid the Book had said to talk through, "my name is Elisa. I live in the village. I would like to speak to someone."

She had expected an immediate response. When it did not come, she raised her voice, careless, now, of the consequences.

"My name is Elisa. I have repaired the transmitter. I must talk to someone, please."

Her only answer was a low, unworldly hissing like the sound of wind across an endless wasteland of autumnal grass. She felt drained now, completely and utterly drained. To come so far and fail. She felt, at last, like praying.

And perhaps that was the answer. The Book had made vague allusions to Senkon, describing Him, from what she could make out, as some creature that covered a large area and controlled all the affairs of man, a creature that had not one mind but thousands, each working in perfect harmony. Perhaps that was the definition of a god.

She knelt before the transmitter and began to recite the prayer.

"*Senkon, Senkon, dieu rhee. Amarganse, Senkon. Khamen, Senkon. Khamen.*"

She repeated the prayer two, three, four times and was about to start the fifth when there was a crackle from the small circular grid.

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"*This is freighter Alpha 429 out of Dellansworld. Please identify yourself and state your purpose of transmission.*"

The voice was that of a woman. Her accent was peculiar, especially in the way she rolled her words so casually together, and Elisa could understand little of what she said. Her heart missed a beat. She found it difficult to breathe.

"*Please identify yourself,*" the voice repeated. "*Come in, caller? Do you read?*"

Come in. *Khamen!* Do you read. *Dieu rhee!* Not a prayer at all!

"Senkon?" Elisa blurted out.

"*CenCon?*" The voice sounded puzzled. "*Yes, we are from, we are employees of, Central Control. Please state your purpose of transmission.*"

Elisa felt her head begin to swim. "Are there many people out there?"

"*Who is this?*" the voice replied.

"My name is Elisa. I live in a village on a world with a lilac sky. I shouldn't be here." She summoned, in her memory, the final records from The Book. "There was a great war, many hundred years ago. Entire worlds were destroyed. My ancestors were children. We were being evacuated to a safer place and . . ."

She faltered, gazing as though in a dream at her own flickering shadow on the transmitter. She had been suddenly surrounded by torchlight. The village was awake.

Two things happened almost at once. The angel lifted from her head and vanished. The moment it had gone, Gorth leapt onto the worship mound and, grabbing Elisa by her hair, dragged her away from the transmitter. She struggled to get back, to complete her message. She was screaming now.

"The ship crashed! All the adults were killed! We were children—we didn't know how to repair the transmitter or how to get back! And we forgot everything! We forgot!"

Sharply, Gorth pulled her head back and pressed a knife to her throat. The words froze in her.

The voice of the Widow Rogash rasped out from the crowd. "She has defiled the altar."

They were as motionless as dead things, all of them. Only the torchlight moved. It caught their set jaws and their staring marble eyes.

"She spoke to Senkon," someone pointed out.

"A *trick*!" Rogash yelled. "Just like all her other tricks! And now these lies of children! Do we look like children? Do *I* look like a child?"

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Around them, some of the villagers were on their knees praying, others were staring vacantly at the night sky. Gorth and the Widow Rogash had skulked away into the shadows.

"What made you change your mind?" Elisa asked.

"The angel came to me."

"It showed you Gorth's mind, and the truth in The Book?"

Semest shook her head. "No, Elisa. It showed me *your* mind, *your* thoughts. It showed me how you felt when I deserted you. I knew, then, what a coward I had been, and I understood what I had to do. For all our sakes, all three of us." Clasping her hands around her belly, she tipped her head back until her pupils reflected the stars. "I wonder what life will be like for my child up there? I must admit it scares me."

"Perhaps that is it," Elisa smiled. "Perhaps your child will grow up never fearing the unknown."

She reached her hands out, and the angel flew to her. She gazed at it a second, and then raised it to her head. *Go home now. Go,* she thought. *And thank you.*

And as she released it, as it began to flutter upwards, its wings caught the light of the myriad stars, of the torches in the village, of the green and yellow and blue bulbs on the transmitter, and turned them into one fantastic arc of fractured radiance that seemed to linger long after the angel itself had gone. It was heading for the mountains. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Our December cover story, "Remembering Siri," is a romantic novelette by Dan Simmons. Mr. Simmons is new to the pages of *IAsfm,* but we're sure you'll find his tale a truly memorable one. We'll also be featuring "Time Bride," an excellent novelette by Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann, and we'll have a rather sinister view of the future in Mary R. Gentle's short story, "The Harvest of Wolves." Besides all our other great stories and columns, you won't want to miss Piers Anthony's "In Defense of Fantasy," which is his response to Charles Platt's Viewpoint in this issue. Be sure to pick up your copy, on sale October 25, 1983.

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"That wasn't what I said," Elisa told her. Gorth twisted her hair savagely, but she ignored the pain and stared up at him. "You *know* that wasn't what I said. At least give me a chance."

And looking up at him, she knew with horrible finality that, even if he guessed she was speaking the truth, he would never admit it. King of the Mud Huts, that was Gorth, Master of all he surveyed. What if that *did* merely comprise a couple hundred scabby villagers in a wretched shanty town? It was *his*. It was *all he knew*. He would not let outsiders take it from him.

The disembodied voice on the transmitter was still talking. It was not addressing Elisa now but seemed to be speaking, aside, to somebody else on the freighter.

"*I can't make it out, Larry. Reception's bad—all I was getting was some garble about villages. Now I'm getting zilch. What say we file it with CenCon, let them work it out?*" There was a pause. "*Okay, I'll give it one more try. Caller,*" she said loudly, "*do you read me? Is this a distress call? Repeat, is this a distress call? Please confirm.*"

Elisa began to open her mouth, and simultaneously she felt Gorth press the knife a fraction harder against her throat. She remained silent, one hand stretched toward the transmitter as though in supplication. The crowd began to close in on her. Their massed hands reached for her and . . .

"Stop!"

They stopped. And they turned. And they stared.

Semest was standing on the worship mound in her nightdress and her cloak. The angel was perched on her shoulder.

Elisa felt Gorth's grip loosen.

"What is the meaning of this, Semest?" he shouted.

Semest's voice was as soft and as gentle as ever, but it contained a firmness and determination Elisa had never heard before. "I will not have my child grow up like you, Gorth, not if there is something better. I will not have my child brought up in brutality and ignorance. I will not have him cower before truth." She turned to the transmitter and said clearly, "Yes, this is a distress call."

There was an audible sigh almost of relief from the other end. "*Understood, caller. We are taking a fix on your transmission now. We will be with you in five hours' time.*"

They were coming! Elisa closed her eyes and smiled sublimely. When she opened her eyes again, she was alone. Gorth's knife was lying at her feet.

Some while later, she went to Semest, and they sat together on the worship mound, looking at each other, grinning secretly.

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(From page 67)

SECOND SOLUTION TO THE DYBBUK AND THE HEXAGRAM

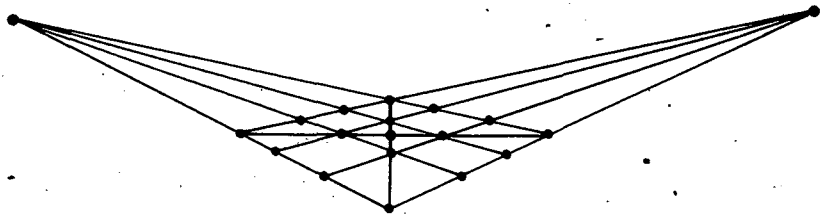
FURICLE is an anagram of LUCIFER.

The problem of placing numbers 1 through 19 on the hexagram to make the star magic was first posed by Harold B. Reiter in his article, "A Magic Pentagram," in *Mathematics Teacher* (March 1983, pages 174–177). Reiter gave it as an unsolved problem, and I had the pleasure of being the first to find two solutions.

The second solution is an inverse of the one given here. It is obtained by subtracting each number from 20. This puts 7 in the center, with the six largest numbers on the outside points. Numbers on opposite corners of the star total 33, opposite numbers on the hexagon total 14, and the magic constant is 54. Note that the two constants, 46 and 54, add to 100. It is not yet known if there are other solutions.

For a discussion of tree-plant problems, see my Mathematical Games column in *Scientific American*, August 1976. An earlier column on magic stars is reprinted in my book *Mathematical Carnival*. If you are curious about the use of pentagrams and hexagrams in medieval black art, two good references are A. E. Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (1911), and Francis Barrett, *Magus* (1801).

Surprisingly, nine is not the maximum number of rows obtainable by planting nineteen trees so that each row contains five. The figure below shows how ten (the maximum) can be achieved.



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Fe_2O_3 and Me

Long days before the age of vegetation,
Before green plants and photosynthesis,
Primeval Sol turned eons-ancient waters
Into elemental gases,
Which, by subtly shifting masses,
Next evolved as NH_3,
Which led, inexorably, to me.

..They say.

The catalyst, in each historic instance,
Was iron oxides (common even then);
At their insistence, crude organic mashes
Sired a trial-and-error broth
Whose evolutionary froth
Hatched the gnarly family tree
That led, conceivably, to me.

...No way.

Though I may spring from common clay,
No savant has the right to say
Plebeian *oxides* qualify as kin;
Contending that my family tree
Began with Fe_2O_3
Is rot; that's not where *my* begats begin.

(It's taken decades to adjust
To thoughts of turning back to dust.
But *rust*...?)

—**Don Anderson**

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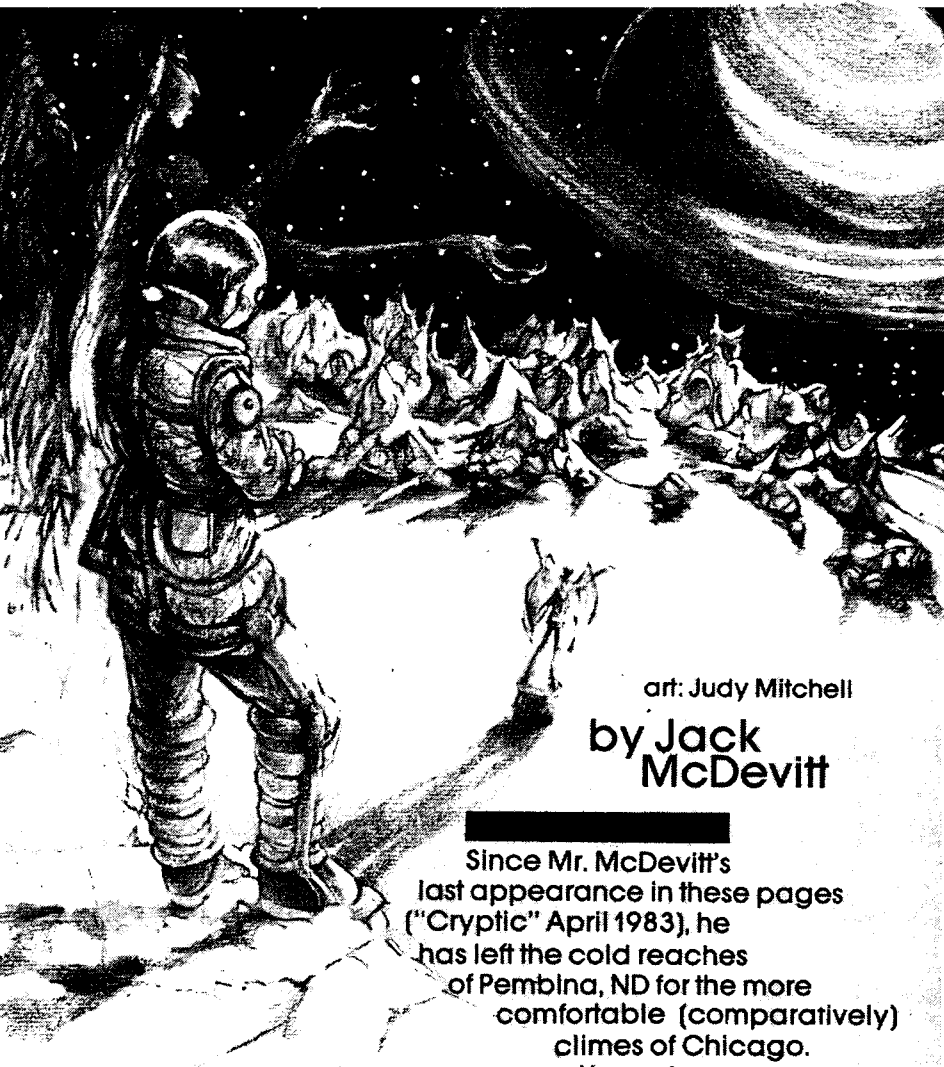

art: Judy Mitchell

by Jack McDevitt

Since Mr. McDevitt's last appearance in these pages ("Cryptic" April 1983), he has left the cold reaches of Pembina, ND for the more comfortable (comparatively) climes of Chicago.

He works as a training specialist for the U.S. Customs Service, and writes in his spare(?) time. We hope he continues to find enough time to write stories like this one.

MELVILLE ON IAPETUS

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The thing was carved of ice. It stood serenely on that bleak, snow-covered plain, a nightmare figure of gently curving claws, surreal eyes, and lean fluidity. The mouth was partially open, rounded, almost sexual. I wasn't sure why it was so disquieting. It was more than simply the talons, or the disproportionately long lower limbs. It was more even than the suggestion of philosophical ferocity stamped on those crystalline features. The emotion I felt—that we all felt—was somehow bound up in the tension between its suggestive geometry and the barren plain on which it was set.

We stood before it, under it, staring. Me, I kept thinking about *Moby Dick*. I know: it made no sense to me either, but that damned white whale wouldn't get out of my head. I'd read a lot of Melville on the long flight out. (The South Seas take on even more glamour when you're confined more or less indefinitely inside a steel cylinder.)

The wings were half-folded. Morgan, beside me, made small circles in the orange-tinted snow with the tip of his right boot.

The creature's blind eyes were aimed at Saturn, frozen low in the hostile sky by its own relentless gravity.

Static crackled in my receiver. "Nice view of the horizon, Terri," said Smith from the command module, somewhere overhead. I mumbled an apology: my primary function at this moment was to keep the camera on-target. "Frank," Smith continued, "how big is it?"

The figure was set on a block about a third its own height. Steinitz approached it, his big boots pushing into the granular stuff underfoot, which was more like sand than snow. His shoulders were on a line with the top of the base. "There's something written here," he said, switching on his lamp. The light penetrated the cloudy reddish-brown ice, and crept up into the lower body.

"It's female," said Morgan.

Yes, I thought, not knowing precisely why: some delicacy of line perhaps, or subtlety of expression. Certainly, no anatomical clues were apparent through the plain garment covering the trunk. Yet it was most decidedly female: it reached out to Steinitz, arms open, legs braced, weight slightly forward. "It reminds me," Morgan continued, "of my wife."

That almost broke the mood. Steinitz laughed, and someone giggled over the phones. We'd all known Jennifer, pensive, sullen, eyes that were lovely only by candlelight. She'd never really been Morgan's wife, other than by informal agreement, but they'd maintained the facade at her insistence, and she'd thereby made

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herself ridiculous. During that last year before departure, when we were gradually reducing our world to the eight people who would make the four-and-a-half year flight, Jennifer had hung on. I think she hoped until the end that Morgan would relent, and abandon the project. Finally, she'd speak to none of us. With Morgan's encouragement, the men joked about her. It was odd: usually, in such a situation, the women in a group would have been protective; but we only stood aside and watched. Perhaps we knew that, though Morgan was bored, the others were not. Their laughter was more contemptible because of what it concealed. But Jennifer also understood, and she felt sorry for *us*.

One day she was simply no longer there.

Morgan hadn't mentioned her since. But he was right: somehow the thing in the plain did suggest Jennifer. Not physically, of course; it resembled no human woman. But it was, I thought, so terribly alone.

"You got an inscription?" asked Smith.

"Yeah. . . ." Steinitz waved at me and I went close with the camera. Three lines of sharp, white, Cyrillic-looking characters were stenciled within the ice. Steinitz's breathing was harsh. He raised the lamp, and swung it slowly from side to side. The letters brightened, lengthened, shifted.

"Nice piece of optics," I said.

"But why? Who the hell's around here to read it?"

I turned, and looked across the wide level plain. We were on Iapetus, one of the more remote places in the solar system, and in fact as remote as I ever care to be. It was, of course, absolutely still. Other than whatever made the ice lady, and occasional falling debris, nothing would have moved on this dreary world for a million years. There's no weather, and no seismic activity. Since Iapetus keeps the same face turned to its parent body, even Saturn doesn't move. From our point of view at the foot of the artifact, the planet was quite close to the horizon, a brilliant red-orange sphere, flattened at the poles, slightly larger than the Moon. The rings were tilted toward us, but they were for the most part obscured by planetary shadow. Immediately beneath it, the landscape had erupted into broken towers of ice and rock, as though tidal forces had run wild. Saturn was in its first quarter.

"How old is the thing, Frank?" came the voice from the ship. "Any ideas?"

Steinitz walked around the base, and stopped on the far side. "No marks in the snow. And the snow's probably untouched for,

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what, thirty, forty thousand years? It's been here a long time, Arleigh. And the damned thing *looks* new."

My feet were getting cold. The temperature outside the suit was in the area of three hundred below, and the pump was having trouble keeping up with it.

We poked and measured and speculated. But we took no samples. After awhile, Steinitz informed Smith that we were ready to return to the landing site.

"Okay, Frank," said Smith. "We're starting Cathie down."

"Okay."

"She'll be coming in less than a kilometer from your artifact. You've got about forty minutes."

"Fine. We'll get the tarps up."

"Maybe it would be better if she didn't try to get so close. I'd hate to have her fall on top of the goddam thing."

They were talking about our future living quarters, an *Athena* (one of five in the linkup), with its fuel storage tanks converted into crew space, and just enough propellant to get down. It would remain after we left, a new artifact for any other visitor who might wander by. It would, I suspected, one day be named for Steinitz.

"Do it the way we planned it, Arleigh," he said. "It's cold down here."

We'd used a sledge to haul a supply of canvas with us. It was clumsy to handle, but we got it over the ice lady, lashed it tight, and added a second tarp.

When we'd finished, we rested briefly, and then started back. Iapetus was in its long night: no sun would be visible for another three weeks.

"Long way from home," said Steinitz.

I was glad to come in out of the dark and get the doors shut behind me.

Cathie Chung had coffee ready. We took it gratefully, trooped into the large central compartment which would serve as command center and dining room, and collapsed into a general heap. Blankets were stacked on a computer frame; I took one and wrapped it about me.

Designers back home must have thought we'd want a place with a view: the bulkheads were, for the most part, transparent. Quartz, I guess. It was a little unnerving. The artifact was still wrapped in canvas. But we knew what was under it. Maybe it was the ice lady that was getting to me; maybe it wasn't. But I

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kept glancing out at the snowfields, and at the distant cluster of broken peaks, watching for movement.

Steinitz and Morgan were talking in whispers. They were discussing the composition of the snow when Steinitz abruptly broke off, lurched out of his chair, and activated the filters. The plain vanished. "I hope nobody minds," he said. "Goddam place gives me the creeps."

We sat a few minutes looking uncomfortably at one another. Then Morgan turned away and put the artifact on his viewer. I pushed down into my blanket to keep warm. Steinitz closed his eyes. His hair had silvered noticeably during the flight, and his skin was hard and pocked, not unlike the moons among which he was making his reputation. He'd left Earth with a mild case of asthma, too much weight, and probably too many years. There were some who felt he shouldn't have come at all. But none among the crew. "That's a nice piece of work out there," he said at last.

I agreed. "I wouldn't have thought it possible to get that kind of articulation and detail into a block of ice," I said.

"Or impact," said Morgan, without looking up. "How would you like to have something like *that* come down on you?"

Chung's eyes flickered, and I felt it too. The remark was uncharacteristic of Morgan, who never admitted to human weakness (other than promiscuity), and certainly not to timidity.

I don't remember much after that. I was tired and everything I owned ached. We'd maintained an intensive exercise program, but the long period of near-zero gravity had loosened joints and weakened muscles. I fell asleep with the conviction that manned space vehicles would go the way of the big paddlewheels.

I woke in near darkness. The two men were asleep in their chairs. Only Chung had retired to her compartment.

We had an early breakfast, most of which was devoted to a long, inconclusive debate on the anatomical feasibility of the ice lady. The figure was obviously idealized. It looked toward Saturn with unmistakable intelligence; and there was something else, some more complex emotion which I could not read, suggested at the juncture of beak and jaw, and in the corners of the eyes. No: I had no doubt that the thing was drawn from life.

Steinitz asked whether anyone had an idea about the inscription. "Name and a date," said Morgan.

"Whose name?"

Morgan studied Steinitz over the rim of his coffee cup. "Depends

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on what the ice lady is. Title of the work, maybe. Or the name of a god."

"Or somebody's claim," observed Chung.

"If so, Cathie," I said, "they're welcome to this rock."

"I was thinking of the Sun." She smiled, and brought her fingertips thoughtfully together in one of those porcelain movements that one associates with pagodas and silk screens. "But I don't think," she added, "there's any religious connotation."

"Oh? Why do you say that?" asked Steinitz.

"Because I have a hard time imagining whatever created that thing beating a drum."

"You're assuming a star-traveler," I said.

"I think you're assuming more than that," observed Steinitz. "I take it you wouldn't expect to find religious institutions in an advanced society?"

Chung smiled indulgently. She was a 40-year-old engineer from Cal Tech, who looked maybe 25. She had level, penetrating gray eyes, but was one of those unfortunates who pride themselves on their intolerance to what they judge to be other people's follies.

"I'm surprised to find *you*, Cathie, of all people, with a closed mind." Steinitz's gaze was friendly; but he made no effort to restrain a tone of gentle mockery. "Are you familiar with Ron Fischer's work?"

Chung had no idea. Morgan put down a glass of orange juice, and said, "He's a physicist, Cathie, best known, I believe, for his work on cognitive time."

"What's that?" she asked.

"It leads eventually," said Steinitz, "to the proposition that the universe is, to some extent, influenced by the fact that it is observed.

"Modern physicists have a problem: the universe really shouldn't exist at all. To function, to hold together, it requires a parade of absurdities. Four-dimensional space, for example. Topologists can play all the games they want to with that extra spatial dimension: you still can't find one of them who can visualize it, or explain which direction to look. It's clearly an impossibility. Yet we know there *is* such a thing, because gravity requires its existence. That's one instance. Curved space is another. Relative time is a third. The strange business with light is a fourth. Do you want me to go on?"

"What about light?" I asked.

"Einstein pointed out that to be coherent, the universe must always look the same to all observers. Whether you're sitting still

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or moving at a high velocity, light always runs ahead at the same pace. It's a ridiculous, but necessary, feature in a cosmos that is to be apprehended. So we argue that, in some indefinable way, the laws of nature are subject to our personal requirements. That sounds suspiciously like a back door into theology, and it may well be. If the idea is at all valid, Cathie, the first interstellar civilization we talk to may be composed mostly of ardent Presbyterians." He stared hard at Chung, and then grinned.

Chung sighed, and turned her attention back to her meal. Morgan looked at her, and then at Steinitz. "If Fischer really believes this is a friendly universe, he needs to go out and take a look at our ice lady," he said.

Yes, I thought: even Morgan, whose self-possession is sometimes indistinguishable from smugness, feels the effects of that plain. "Melville," I said. They looked at me, and Steinitz's eyebrows went up. "Morgan's right. That's a hell of an unfriendly place out there. If your boy Fischer had read his Melville, he wouldn't be composing nonsense."

"Melville?" said Steinitz, puzzled. "Are we talking about whales now?"

"We're talking about a hostile creation," said Chung, "where any right-thinking Presbyterian can expect to get eaten."

Steinitz nodded. "Any other ideas?"

"One," said Morgan. "Maybe it's a grave."

The Greenways landed later in another modified *Athena*, this one with the crew's quarters converted to cargo space. The cargo, of course, would be the artifact. That prospect depressed me, and I didn't know why. Is it possible to vandalize something in a location so remote that nobody would ever see it anyhow?

The Greenways were our only married couple. Steinitz had performed the ceremony about six months out, with appropriate remarks and filming to commemorate the first extraterrestrial wedding. The marriage, incidentally, was in trouble, but that's another story and has nothing to do with events on Iapetus. Smith and Colby were still in orbit with the two remaining ships, which were, of course, linked. We had a considerable safety margin: only two *Athenas* were needed to get everybody home. And we had four, counting the cargo carrier. (If it came to that, the ice lady would get left.)

Steinitz, the Greenways, and Chung went out to examine the artifact. Morgan and I wandered about the landscape to see what

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else we could find. At one point, I heard somebody gasp over the phones. Morgan laughed. "They just took off the tarps."

That afternoon, Steinitz announced that he had no doubt we were missing something. "Has to be more here than this," he said. So we spread out and looked.

There weren't really many places to hide anything, other than under the snow cover itself. We poked among a few groups of boulders, wandered down into occasional craters, and gradually drifted southeast, toward the chain of gaping rocks and ice behind which Saturn seemed eternally about to set.

It was cold and exhausting. Our suits dragged, and I've done nothing in my life more boring than walking in circles across that dreary surface. Periodically, Steinitz recalled us, sympathized, and sent us out again. Smith and Colby had disconnected and joined the search, circling overhead in tight orbits, radioing negative reports every hour. "Snow," Colby took to saying in her full-throated British accent, rolling the 'n.' She too was weary, and a note of exasperation appeared in her voice by the third day.

On the fourth morning, Morgan and Chung found footprints.

"Don't go near them!" shouted Steinitz from the far side of the search area. "Back off! Are you sure they don't belong to one of us?"

Chung giggled, an odd high-pitched sound. "Not unless somebody's running around in bare paws!"

Steinitz called everybody in. "Get some rest," he said, rubbing his hands together. "After lunch, we're going to make history." He was wearing a huge grin; in fact, we all had our juices up. We drank coffee and cokes, and wished for something strong. But it didn't seem to matter. When we set out, four hours later, we were an unruly mob, happy, excited, much in the spirit of a bunch of bar-hopping drunks. It felt good.

I'm not sure what we expected: to discover, perhaps, an alien base, long-abandoned, buried beneath the snow; or possibly a wrecked ship with a star drive intact! I wondered if Steinitz would be disappointed if we found only a symphony.

The laughter died away as we walked, and each of us subsided into his own thoughts. We were advancing on the peaks, which curved over the horizon, forming a modest (if rugged) mountain chain. Chung and Morgan had found the track in their shadow.

There were two sets, coming and going. They rose into the uplands, and went out onto the plain.

The paw, the foot, was about half again as large as a human

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foot. It was wider and more symmetrical, and it had claws. "It's Jennifer," someone said. But it was no attempt at humor. "The thing on the plain is a self-portrait."

"It *was* wearing a suit," said Steinitz. "Very thin, possibly molded to the body."

We followed the tracks out across the snowfield, in the general direction of the artifact. After about a quarter-mile they stopped. Dead in the middle of the snow. And it was precisely the point at which they began.

"What the hell goes on?" said Morgan.

Steinitz motioned us to keep back. Ira Greenway advanced cautiously and took pictures.

"It couldn't have flown out," I said.

"What then?"

"They start and end at the same place," said Chung, sounding a little shaken. "It stepped up onto a platform of some kind. There must have been a ship here."

We spread out and looked for other marks in the snow, but found nothing. Maybe the ship had long narrow struts, and the granular composition of the snow simply didn't retain the impressions. Maybe they had teleportation. Maybe there was no ship. After awhile we went back the other way, and followed the tracks up into the hills. They plunged through deep snow and petered out on rocky ground. Twice, before sheer walls, they stopped, and we recovered them further up.

We emerged, finally, on a ridge, scrambling the last few hundred yards across sheets of thick ice. Near the top, a block had been cut cleanly out. Bits and pieces of loose ice were scattered about the slope. My heart was pounding. Steinitz, straining for breath, held us up. "This is where it made the ice lady," he said.

"But how?" asked Ira Greenway. He was tall and ungainly in the suit, in sharp contrast to his athletic wife. "The prints don't go within thirty yards of it!"

"The son-of-a-bitch has anti-gravity," whispered Steinitz.

The prints wandered across the crest of the ridge, near the far edge. I looked down: the ice dropped sharply away, and the plain resumed.

Steinitz almost loped alongside the tracks. He glanced neither left nor right, hurrying purposefully along the rim, with the rest of us in tow. Not far beyond the cut, the ridge narrowed and dipped, and the prints went no further. The creature appeared to have paused at the summit, perhaps glancing back in the direction it had come. (The artifact was out there now, though not visible

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in the gloom.)

And she had started back.

Steinitz stood a long time, staring at the mild confusion of tracks. When at last he merely shrugged, it was a gesture that said it for us all.

They started down. I stayed awhile, violating safety procedures, but no one noticed.

She had been alone.

The stars were hard and cold, and the spaces between them pressed on me as they must have pressed on her. It struck me that Saturn had probably not moved since she stood here, how long ago?

Melville: there is a sequence in *Moby Dick* in which the cook is washed overboard and drifts away from the ship. The seas are heavy, and a moment comes when water and sky fill the universe, when the *Pequod* is gone, and the cook is utterly *alone*. They do not get him back whole.

The image on the plain is terrifying, yes: but not because it has claws and wings, or pitiless eyes. *But because it is alone.*

I was beginning to feel the cold, and it was a long way back to the ship. I looked up (as she must have); half-a-dozen moons were in the sky: Titan, with its thin envelope of methane; Rhea and Hyperion, and some of the smaller satellites: frozen, spinning rocks, like this one, sterile, immeasurably old, no more capable of supporting a thinking creature than the bloated gasbag they circle. Steinitz had argued for a benevolent cosmos. But Steinitz had never stood alone on this ridge. Only I have done that.

And one other.

The universe is a precarious, drafty haven for anything that thinks. There are damned few of us, and it is a wide world, and long. I wondered who she was. Long since gone to dust, no doubt. But nevertheless, *Jennifer*, I wish you well.

We took the ice lady down and packed her for the long trip that would end eventually in the Smithsonian. There, they would put her in a refrigerated cubicle, surrounded by gleaming staircases and coke machines. No matter: I suspect her maker would be pleased, and possibly amused.

We opened the command module to space. If anyone else ever passes this way, it'll be there, just the way we left it. And on the dining board, he'll find my ID. It's not a very good picture: you know how official photos are. But they'll understand.

It was the best I could do on short notice. ○

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Peter Viereck, whose *Terror & Decorum* (Greenwood Press, 1972) won the Pulitzer prize for poetry, is publishing *Archer In The Marrow* with W.W. Norton in 1984. This will be the first serious American poetry book to contain a long science-fiction chapter.

IN MEMORIAM PHILIP K. DICK 1928-1982

(On the tombstone of the world's most imaginative science-fiction writer, imagine carving this verse dialogue. The ghost voice in italics is his; the second speaker, the "practical" unheroic wearer of blinkers, is maybe you, dear reader, or I.—P.V.)

Common sense: don't look close or
You might see the scene-changers, rednecks in overalls,
Beer cans in one hand, props in the other.
"Props?"—*Of, say, Bagdad changing to Oshkosh.*
"Natch; not born yesterday; learnt common sense
The time I was touring the tops of a cloud, where
I saw that the sky's a blue blanket with holes."
Reality is what, when you don't believe in it,
Won't go away.
"Those sky holes, they had cookie-cutter star shapes;
The rednecks with sixpacks were shining a flashlight
through.
I wasn't seen seeing them. But. What. If."
Snooping's not . . . practical; a caught snooper—
*Well, why do you think they zapped Horselover Fat?**
"I'll try not to look close."

—by Peter Viereck

*"Horselover Fat"—combining the Greek meaning of "phil hippos" with the German meaning of his last name—was Philip Dick's secret self in his book *Valis;* "zap" was his secret weapon in his book *Zap Gun.*

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The author, who has been writing steadily for over two years now, has sold two short stories to *Omni*, one to the Warner anthology *Perpetual Light*, and one (this one) to *IAsfm*. He works days as a junior high school English instructor in Salt Lake City, where he's lived for the last ten years.

BROKEN WINGS

by Gregg Keizer

art: D. Della Ratta

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"Murders? No, I hadn't heard of any murders," Van Zeldt said, drawing deeply on a cigarette, tapping ash onto the scarred table. He looked up through the smoke and glanced at the inspector of detectives who sat on the other side.

"There was mention of one in the newspaper two weeks ago," the inspector said, fingering the papers before him. "Surely you noticed it."

"No, no," said Van Zeldt, flicking ash from his cigarette, even though he had not taken another puff. "Ah, yes, yes, I do. Now I remember. It was near the School, a man stabbed, or strangled, or something. Is that the one?"

"Ones," the policeman said. "There've been three, though we've kept that part of it quiet until now. Vagrants, by their appearances, apparently all killed by the same person."

"Why tell me this?"

"Just questioning the instructors of the School, that's all, Mr. Van Zeldt. We just want to make sure no one saw anything . . ." he said, pausing, ". . . unusual. Without telling us, of course."

"Of course."

"Well, *did* you see anything unusual? Two nights ago?" asked the inspector, glancing again at his papers, pushing some aside.

"No," said Van Zeldt, his face hidden behind the smoke from his cigarette. "Nothing out of the ordinary. I've been too busy to even get out of the School."

"Ah, yes," the policeman said, his voice close to mimicking the hoarseness of Van Zeldt, who glared at him but said nothing. "They are all the same? Identical, I mean?"

"Clones always are."

"Of course, of course. Still, it must be difficult, teaching them the same thing, each one getting the same instruction," the inspector said, his voice now his own again, soft and pliant.

Van Zeldt pressed the cigarette into the tabletop, snuffing it out before shaking another from the package next to his arm. They were Camels, but not American-made, for he could taste the harshness of the inferior European tobacco.

"At times it's difficult," Van Zeldt answered, putting his plated lighter back in his jacket pocket. "We're careful. We monitor our progress daily, check the girls to make sure there is no deviation. That none of them gets turned."

"Turned?"

"Just a phrase with the instructors." Van Zeldt smiled gently. "It just means changed, different. If we were to find one considerably different from the others, then she'd be turned, we'd say.

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Minor variations are allowable, but not something significant. Hasn't happened, though."

"Of course," said the detective, shuffling his papers together, signalling the interview was completed. Van Zeldt scraped the chair on the stone floor as he pushed away from the table. He was turning for the door when the inspector spoke. "You will be sure to ring us if you find or see anything unusual, won't you? All three were killed within two kilometers of the School." The policeman smiled, matching Van Zeldt's expression. "For your own safety. And the girls', of course."

"Of course," said Van Zeldt quietly, leaving the empty package of cigarettes on the table as he walked from the room. The door slid shut slowly on its metal track, cutting him off from the smiling inspector of detectives and his strange questions.

"No, no, no, you're doing it all wrong. Like this," Van Zeldt said, taking Richtje's hand and guiding it as he forced her to scrape the clay more fluidly, with longer strokes. Like an apple peeling, slivers of the hard clay curled off the block and fell to the floor. "There, that's it. Good, Richtje, very good." He stepped back from the small girl, watching her twelve-year-old hands master the tool and the clay, pleased that she was doing it exactly as he'd showed her. She always did. *They* always did, he reminded himself, looking at the other five Richtjes in the room, all standing in front of identical clay blocks, with identical tools in their identical hands. He pulled deeper on the cigarette hanging from his lower lip, blew the smoke towards the open windows on the far side of the sunlit room.

One more to go, he thought, walking towards the Richtje in the corner near the door. He wished, for the thousandth time, that there was some way to tell them apart, but of course that was forbidden under the contract. They were to be identical, or there would be no bonus, no final payment for the education. He had to be content with his memory.

"No, no, no, you're doing it all wrong. Like this," he said as he stood behind the sixth and final girl. He had the little criticism memorized by now, the words sure and level. If he criticized one of the cloned girls, he criticized them all, in turn.

They could not be perfectly identical; that was impossible. They probably talked when they were alone, perhaps explored their minute differences. No one was really sure how significant these details of their education would become in the finished Richtjes, but common sense told him that minor events, or words, or even

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rebukes would not turn one Richtje from the others. They were too close. Even their moods were similar, for they seemed to share that peculiar communication known only to identical twins. One caught a cold somehow, and within hours the others felt the symptoms, actually ran a fever without having the virus in them. Yet he played the repeating game when he could. It did no harm. Discipline one, discipline them all. Quite simple, actually, he thought idly as one part of his mind said the words she had to hear, another part feeling him holding her hand at the same angle as the ones before.

It was a relatively simple job, teaching these girls sculpture and oils and watercolors. Much better than starving from the gallery sales and infrequent commissions he had once had back in the States. There'd been critics who praised his work, but that hadn't brought in money, he thought as he watched the last Richtje pare away the excess clay. He would never go back. Why return to the hulking piles of stone and steel that had been cities before the 'surgical strike', the nuclear lance the Soviets had pierced through the American defense?

Art was dead in America and he knew he was lucky he had escaped, though he still had nightmares of the bodies. There weren't many calls for artists now-a-days, no matter how good, not even here, where the Soviets were content to let the small nations of the Continent practice their strange style of capitalism. Someone had to build the computers and oil-refining machinery and television sets.

Or even the geniuses like the Richtjes, here at the School. He was sure it wasn't the government that paid for the Richtjes, that had set up their birthing and education here in Maastricht, in southern Holland. This School for only six pupils. It was so extravagant, he thought; the School would have only one graduating class. No one knew who had started the cloning or for what reason. Perhaps the Administrator knew, but not any of the staff. They had talked about it among themselves, over drinks in the lounge, but each had his own suspicions. Van Zeldt thought it was a woman who had paid for the birthing, using her own cells for the Richtjes. Perhaps a very wealthy and egotistical woman, he had said over his Dutch-made bourbon. Someone who wanted herself to live long and fully, he had posited to the other instructors. It was as good a theory as any.

The bell chimed softly and he heard himself tell the girls it was time. They put their tools on the small tables next to them, again in the same fluid motion, before walking to the bookcase to collect

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their things. A fragmentary queue formed as they reached for their books, one after the other, before they stepped through the doorway and headed down the corridor. Towards Language class, Van Zeldt knew; they had Language after him.

He walked into the small room where he did his own work. The grey mass of clay filled the center of the room. Lighting a cigarette, he picked at the clay, gazing at the circle of demons that surrounded the solitary angel whose wing he'd molded broken. The piece was only roughed in, none of the features completed. He hadn't been able to decide what faces to give them.

He pressed the clay into the torso of one of the demons, again trying to decide if five were too many, or too few. As his fingers touched the clay, smoothed it flush with the line of the demon's shoulder, he couldn't help but think of his nightmares. Every time he tried to sculpt he had them. They came when he could still feel the tools in his fingers, images full of the corpses that had lined the streets in the States after the War, before he came here.

Suddenly, he didn't feel like working on the piece and he walked back into his classroom, locking the door of the workroom behind him.

He pulled three Camels from the package in his shirt pocket, placed the package on the table and followed the girls into the hallway. Fingering the three cigarettes, he glanced down the corridor, but it was empty, the Richtjes already in Language, so he walked towards the staff lounge, his shoes scuffing the tiled floor. He thought about the inspector and the questions he'd asked this morning. The questions hinted that someone from the School knew something about the murders. The idea was ridiculous, Van Zeldt thought; it was simply a coincidence that the murders had taken place nearby. There was plenty of insanity on the streets now. The War's own peculiar, massive madness had shoved those close to the edge of sanity that extra inch. At least the School didn't have to worry. The security system in the old, rented building was extensive and never-sleeping. No one could get in.

The lounge was crowded, as it always was after three. His was the next-to-last class of the day and all but two of the staff were here. He wondered how many the inspector had already questioned.

"I say it was the right thing to do. The only thing," said Watterson, the thick-set musician who taught strings and winds. Van Zeldt went to the sideboard and poured himself three fingers of ersatz bourbon. He sipped at it, came close to spitting it out, as he almost always did lately. He stood near the wall, lit one of the

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Camels and slid the other two into his shirt pocket, the thoughts of asking who had been questioned by the inspector pushed to the back of his mind.

"They had to be put to sleep, that's all there's to it," Watterson said, some of the other instructors nodding in agreement, Van Zeldt saw. "The project depends on none of them turning. The deviation is already above what it should be. It was the only thing to do, by rights."

"Well, I wouldn't have done it," said Seiches, the calculus instructor, her voice too loud for the small room.

Van Zeldt walked towards Aute DeGroot, the only person sitting alone, the only other American among the instructors at the School. Aute was the political and government instructor. Eminently qualified, Van Zeldt knew, for she had been a state's governor before the War. Iowa, or had it been Michigan? Van Zeldt couldn't recall. She glanced up at him from her chair as he stood beside her.

"What are they talking about, Aute?" he asked, pointing his half-empty glass towards Watterson and Seiches.

"You haven't heard?" Aute asked, her gaze wavering slightly as she looked at him. He shook his head, drew on the cigarette and exhaled slowly. "One of the Richtjes' cats died this morning. Right after Chemistry. Got caught in one of the damned sliding doors near Quarters. Crushed it, I guess." Van Zeldt made a motion to indicate confusion. "So the Administrator had the rest of the girls' kittens killed too. Watterson and the Administrator did it. Placed each of the cats on the track of a sliding door, crushed them all, just the way the first one was. Identical. For the good of the project, and all that.".

"Oh, God," he whispered.

"Maybe you should talk to them," Aute said. Van Zeldt looked up from his drink. "The Richtjes, I mean. You're their favorite, you know. If you talked to them, perhaps it would make it easier for them to understand."

"*I* don't understand. How can I make them?" Van Zeldt asked. He inhaled cigarette smoke again, barely noticing Aute's voice as she continued to talk. This is insane, he thought. Killing a cat just so the clones would turn out alike.

"Personally, I never talk to them individually. That only lets in the possibility of variance with them," he heard Seiches say too loudly. She's had too much to drink again, he thought.

"I agree," Watterson said. "The deviation is increasing. Sooner or later one will turn."

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"What's causing it?" Van Zeldt asked, angry at Watterson's sureness. He lit his second cigarette.

Watterson shrugged his oversize shoulders, arranged his bulk in his chair. "Four points difference between one group of three and the rest. Could be one of us, not doing the job," he said, his eyes focused on Van Zeldt. Is he accusing me? Does he believe I'm not careful when I'm with the Richtjes? Does he really think such puny things could turn one of the Richtjes? "Has to be something important with that wide a deviation. One of them's bound to turn. Soon." His words didn't fall away, but seemingly scurried around the room. Everyone knew what would happen if one of the Richtjes turned, came out dissimilar. The contract would be nullified, the girls removed, the School closed and the jobs gone. Most important, Van Zeldt thought, would be the loss of the bonus. Enough to keep him here, away from the States and the nightmares, for the rest of his life. He had been staggered at the figure offered for the job, even more confused by the enormous amount that would be credited his account when the girls completed their coursework. Another two years and he, along with everyone on staff, would be rich.

The conversation went around him while he thought about the inspector and his strange questions, the concern about the methods used to educate the Richtjes. 'Getting the same instruction', the inspector had said, or had he asked? Van Zeldt was not sure which.

"I still say that their lives were not as vital as the outcome of the project," he heard Watterson say. He must mean the cats, Van Zeldt thought, yet wondering if there was more than a single meaning to the man's words. A sudden shiver, like too-cold air on a hot, humid afternoon, swept over his back and into his mind. He shuddered involuntarily, ash falling off his cigarette and glowing briefly in the carpet. What if the philosophy was applied to humans, what then? There'd been three murders and three of the girls' scores had deviated from the others. Coincidence? He set down his drink and walked from the room before the shudder betrayed him again.

He had smoked a package of cigarettes since dinner, each of them glowing in the darkness of his room in the staff wing. He could see the Richtjes' Quarters from his window, the six rooms dark, the courtyard of the School brightly lit by the lamps high on the walls.

He was waiting for something to happen. He had sat at the

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window since sundown, staring into the courtyard and at Quarters, hoping that nothing would move in the crisply lined shadows or across the lighted yard. But somehow, he knew that he would eventually see a figure, perhaps a small, solitary figure, dart into the darkness. He'd convinced himself that the murders had something to do with the Richtjes. Watterson's remarks about the relative worth of things convinced him of it.

As he lit another cigarette and flipped the lighter closed, he saw them. Two figures, not the single one he had expected, but a pair, walking along the edge of the building toward the street that fronted the School. They were briefly silhouetted against the light of the courtyard and he recognized the small twelve-year-old shape of a Richtje. The other was an adult, but it was impossible to tell if it was male or female, though its gait suggested the latter.

He reached for his jacket, grabbed the half-empty package of cigarettes and walked as silently as he could down the hall and through the door leading into the courtyard. They were gone, but he had seen where they were heading; towards the small park that bordered one edge of the School. He was not good at skulking, he thought to himself as he walked through the shadows and across the street. The trees of the park were dimly visible as darker shapes against the moonless sky. Even the starlight seemed dimmer than it should. He stopped when he was in the thin growth of trees, listening, hoping to pick them out by their noise.

He heard the choking sob to his left, seemingly right next to him, though he knew that sounds traveled far in the night air. He crept towards the sound, hearing it only once more before he saw them. Three figures now, two standing, one kneeling on the ground, its hands tight behind its back. He could just make out the Richtje, her shoulders level with the head of the kneeling figure. The girl's hand was raised and Van Zeldt could hear the quiet hum of a powerknife and even in the darkness he could see it glint when its blade vibrated, the soft light coming from its power unit. Richtje's hand flashed down and the hum was gone, the knife embedded in the shoulder of the kneeling shape. Van Zeldt heard the sob (or was it just the sound of the powerknife in flesh?) and turned his head, wanting to vomit into the dirt, wanting a cigarette to purge the taste in his mouth, knowing that he could not strike a light, for the Richtje and her companion would see him.

He listened to the two of them whisper, he listened to the ragged

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breathing of the dying, and then he listened to Richtje and the other walk away through the short grass. How long he sat in the darkness and listened to the gurglings of the murdered, he could not tell, but finally it grew silent. Only then did he dare crawl to the still-warm body. By the flicker of his lighter, he saw that it was a man, his hands bound behind his back. By his ragged clothing, one of the hundreds of wandering homeless, perhaps lured to the park by the promise of cigarettes or liquor, Van Zeldt thought. Vagrants, the inspector had said.

He had the presence of mind to keep to the shadows as he stumbled through the park and across the deserted street back to the School. Not until he staggered back to his room, threw himself into the chair by the window and smoked five cigarettes straight, did he vomit.

He had seen death before. He had seen and smelled the ridges of corpses in the cities after the War. But he had never seen murder done. Suddenly, he wondered if Richtje had gotten the powerknife from the kitchen here at the School. Or perhaps from his own workroom, for he kept one to cut frames for his canvases. Unable to merely think of it, he ran to his workroom, his bare feet making slapping sounds on the floor, and searched the drawers in the darkness for his powerknife. He found it buried under brushes and rags, where he'd left it. Turning it on, he checked the power unit, breathing easier when he saw that it was still full, that it hadn't been used since he'd last recharged it.

The School was showing the Richtjes how to kill, he thought as he cradled the powerknife in his hands. Somehow, for some reason, the Richtjes were getting instruction not on the syllabus. Touching the still-unformed blocks of clay with his fingers, he thought of the Richtjes in his classroom that day. No, the day before, he realized, looking at the clock on the wall. Their fingers had almost been as graceful as his own when he sculpted. Yet at least one of them, probably four of them, had held a powerknife and used it to kill. The contradiction between art and murder astonished him.

Perhaps one of them killed first, by mistake, an accident, he thought. Or maybe one of the Richtjes went mad from the sameness of herself and her sisters. It didn't really matter how it had started. Only that it continued. Someone was making sure the Richtjes came out of School with identical experiences, identical thought processes. Each one, in turn, was being taken and led to a murder, handed a powerknife and told what to do. It would not

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be difficult. The girls did everything asked of them; none had ever questioned an instruction in their eight years here at the School.

But he knew he wouldn't stop it. He couldn't. If he did, two of the Richtjes would be turned. He remembered the feeling of the crisp bills they had given him when he first came on staff and remembered even more the figures on the contract he had signed. Enough to keep him away from the States for the rest of his life, out of the dead cities and away from the nightmares.

He sat in the chair by the window the rest of the night, watching the gray courtyard disappear as the sun glanced onto the walls of the School. He smoked through two packages, letting the crushed ends fall to the floor between his feet. The powerknife from his workroom hummed quietly as he turned it on and off, again and again. Its dim light was comforting. He reached for the telephone twice during the darkness, but replaced the receiver each time without getting the connection to the police station where the inspector said he could be reached. He even pulled the file that held his contract from his cabinet and lay it on his lap, open to the page he'd signed, the page where the figures were printed. Enough to keep him here for the rest of his life. He closed the file and smoked his last cigarette, knowing he had to let the murders continue. He had no choice, he told himself, over and over.

The clay blocks in front of each of the girls were taking form as the tools carved and sliced into them. Van Zeldt leaned back against his desk, cigarette in his lips, and stared at the Richtjes. All six were carefully studying the sculpture bound within the clay, looking at the block for long seconds before stepping forward, in one motion, and pushing a bit of clay into place. Van Zeldt tried to imagine one of the girls, powerknife in her hands, tried to visualize her slight form in the park the night before, standing over the sobbing man. He wondered which one of the clones had been in the park last night, which had already murdered someone, which had yet to hear the dying. As always, it was useless, he thought. It was impossible to tell them apart and it was just as impossible to tell which were innocent and which were guilty. In a way, they all were. They were all alike. Especially today, he noticed, for they all seemed on edge. It was subtle, and though he'd seen it before, only now did he know the reason. They were all of them afraid. The one who had murdered was still frightened, and so they all caught the mood's virus. Just as they were always ill together, so they shared this.

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He saw one of the Richtjes brush back her too-blond hair with a nervous gesture that was common to them, then noticed that all had brushed their hair back. Did they watch each other, make sure they copied every movement and mannerism? Or did they affect the same gestures out of habit, not knowing they did so? Van Zeldt had asked himself this before, but it was more important now. Lives were wasted to answer the questions.

Looking at the girls, lighting another cigarette and blowing the smoke above their heads towards the open window, he felt the dualism of the Richtjes. Little twelve-year-old girls, their Dutch features a stereotype from some brochure of the years before the War, they were distant from him, from everyone else at the School, by their sameness and unusual birthing. He'd never felt close to the girls, even though Aute maintained they admired him most of all, confident it was the proper teacher-pupil relationship, but now he was not so sure. Perhaps he had felt the distance simply because they were so different. Different and yet the same. He smiled around the cigarette at the thought. How would the inspector of detectives know which of the Richtjes to arrest, which to let go, if he did go to the police? Van Zeldt wondered. It would be impossible to tell which of the girls had murdered and which had not. It was just easier to leave things be, for he would not return to the States. He had to hold on to the job and hope the bonus came in two years.

The bell chimed softly and he watched the girls put up their tools and aprons, reach for their books and queue at the doorway. Van Zeldt watched them, wondering if they took turns being the first, or the last, out the door.

Grabbing three cigarettes from the package in his pocket, he left the room and walked to the lounge, listening to the sounds of his shoes on the floor. There were fewer people in the lounge than usual, though Aute was there, sitting by herself as she always did.

"You look tired, Pieter," she said as he sat beside her on the couch. He sipped at the strange-tasting bourbon and made a face. "Up all night sculpting?" she asked.

He hesitated, too long, he knew. "Why do you ask?"

"I saw a light in your workroom. About two this morning," she said, gazing at him. "What are you sculpting now? A new demon to match the others?"

Van Zeldt saw the sculpture in his mind, wishing he didn't, wishing he could concentrate on Aute's strange questions. But he saw the piece instead, the demons around the solitary angel.

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He shook his head, tried to laugh, but couldn't make it sound right. "No, a gargoyle. For Notre Dame. I heard they lost one recently." He tried to laugh again.

She stared at him and he felt uncomfortable, as if there was some unseen danger here. He had wanted to talk to Aute, tell her of what he had seen the night before, but now he was not so sure.

"You really should get more rest, Pieter," she said, her voice almost a whisper. "Dangerous to let yourself run down. You can't sculpt in hospital, can you?" Her hand moved to her temple, brushed her hair back briefly, her gesture making Van Zeldt's throat go dry and sour. She brushed her hair again. Just like the Richtjes, he thought, just like the other six. But now there were seven.

He managed to stand and walk from the lounge, not even spilling his whiskey, he remembered later. He must have dropped his cigarettes, for when he got to his room and found he had none in his shirt pocket, he had to open a new package. His hand was steady and he was surprised that he had not fallen on the floor in the lounge and become hysterical. Aute was their mother. Once he realized that, the resemblance was unavoidable. But why Aute? She had been a brilliant politician, but every instructor was brilliant in some field.

She was here to mark the Richtjes', her daughters' (sisters'?) progress. She was also helping them murder.

He punched the telephone for the inspector of detectives but hung up the receiver before the connection was made. What could he say to him? That the School was murdering people as part of its curriculum? Even if he *was* believed, it would mean the end of the School. He saw the images of his nightmares in his mind and knew he couldn't go back to the States. And no one had actually threatened him, not actually. Was he really in danger? Was Aute really questioning him about his actions of the night before? Did she really suspect that he knew of the Richtjes' crimes of identity?

As he sat in the chair by the window and smoked, he thought and considered his possibilities. He could go to the inspector, but then the project would die. He could leave, though that too would force him to the States. He could even do nothing and sweat the two years left before the bonuses came. But he decided on something different.

He waited in the darkness of his room, as he had the night before, watching the courtyard and trying to remember what time

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it had been when he'd seen the two figures leave Quarters and walk across the street and into the park. The powerknife's sound as he left it on made him feel secure. Its light assured him he was doing the right thing. His throat was dry from the image of Aute and her hair and from his constant smoking. Then he saw them. A small, slim shadow and a fuller, more confident one. Aute; he knew now; it had to be her.

He followed them again, keeping to the shadows, the powerknife heavy in his pocket. He thought of what he would do. Surprise them before the murder began, push Aute away and reach for the Richtje. With her in his hands, Aute would have to listen to him. The murders had to stop, he would say to her, or the police will come and take the Richtjes away. The killings must stop. We can find other ways to make the girls identical. He thought and rehearsed what he would say to Aute as he crept through the stand of trees, listening carefully for the noises of death. That's where they'll be.

He found them in a small clearing, the thin sliver of moon barely lighting the scene. He was too late. Richtje was crouching over a dark shape on the ground and Van Zeldt could hear and see the powerknife in her hands. It hummed quietly, interrupted only when she thrust it into the shape on the ground. His plans fled from his mind and he squatted in the darkness beside a tree, unsure of what to do.

He heard them whisper to each other, Richtje and Aute, who stood beside the girl while the murder went on. Van Zeldt pulled the powerknife from his pocket and switched it on, secure when he heard the dull noise from the blade that vibrated too fast for eyes to follow. Then he stepped into the clearing and walked towards the trio, trying to ignore the sounds of the one on the ground.

Perhaps they were expecting him, he thought much later. Perhaps that was why they were not surprised when he walked up to them with a glowing powerknife in his hands.

"Hello, Mr. Van Zeldt," said the Richtje, surprising him, for he had expected only Aute to speak.

"Say something to her, Pieter," Aute said when he didn't reply to the girl's greeting. Aute moved until she stood between Van Zeldt and the girl, her motions confident. She waved the Richtje back into the darkness, and all the while Van Zeldt could only stand quietly. It had gone differently in his imagination.

"I know what you've been doing," he finally said, speaking to Aute, not to the girl. "I've seen the last two," he said. "It has to

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stop before the police find out." Somehow when he said it aloud it sounded ridiculous and overly melodramatic.

The sounds of the form on the ground had stopped but the park's silence was smashed as Aute's laughter echoed in his ears. Her laughter was strong, but her voice was merely a whisper. "You, of all of us, should approve of this, Pieter." She paused. "Put the knife away. Please, Pieter."

"What are you talking about?" he asked, feeling his hand relax, though he kept the powerknife pointed at her. The hum of its blade seemed quieter. "What are you saying?"

"You are from America too, Pieter," she said, her voice sounding as if the fact would make him understand. "The Richtjes are to go to America, Pieter." When he didn't say anything she went on. "You haven't been home since the War, have you? I have. I've seen the death there. Richtje . . ." she said, and she moved her arm in the darkness. Perhaps she meant the gesture to mean all six Richtjes. ". . . Richtje must be ready for that death before she goes to America. She must see it, feel it, with her own hands. Otherwise she will never be able to understand, much less work in our country. These men will never be missed," she said, pointing to the body on the ground. "I brought them here for the Richtjes. It was the only way, Pieter."

"Work?" he asked quietly, unsure he had heard her correctly.

"Why do you think the Richtjes were birthed, Pieter? America is fragmented, falling apart, each region going its own way. The Richtjes will take control of them, press them together. My skills are in them; that's why they're from *me*. The Richtjes will act as one, think as one. Our country will be unified. It paid for the School. Who else would have such funds?" she asked, her laughter almost coming through again. The Richtje's form was vague in the background darkness.

"It's insane," he whispered, shifting the powerknife to the tips of his fingers, balancing it loosely on them. He could feel its slight vibration through his fingers, palm, and wrist. In his mind he saw the hillocks of bodies they had burned in huge pyres. And now they were going to send for, had in fact created, girls who had killed with their own hands. Murderers leading murderers. Death leading death.

He stepped forward, the powerknife in his hand, knowing only that he had to do *something*, that he could not allow this girl, these girls, to return to his country and propagate death. There had been enough killing, he thought as he saw the mountains of dead in the streets.

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"No, it's insane," he hissed, raising the knife above his shoulder, feeling it hum in his hand. He didn't care for the money, for the girls, for the School.

He pushed Aute aside and lunged for the Richtje, his arm arcing down, the flickering light of the powerknife streaking through the darkness. Aute screamed.

Then the vibration of his powerknife stilled and he knew, somewhere in the terror in his mind, that the charge was exhausted, the power drained from the long hours he had sat with it humming to him. It was Richtje who shielded herself with her own powerknife as his motionless blade swung down. Her knife, raised to protect herself, caught the edge of his hand as it moved and he felt only an odd chill on his fingers.

He looked down and saw his darkened knife on the ground, one finger, he couldn't tell which, wrapped around its handle. His hand, cool in the night air, felt a draft and he gazed at it passively. The blood steamed from the place where the finger had been, but still it felt cold. In the distance he heard Aute's screams, but he paid them no mind. He could only gaze at the finger lying on the ground by his feet. He felt himself crumple then, his vision blurred, and thought only of how he would sculpt without it.

He awoke in the infirmary of the School, his hand bandaged and his arms restrained with straps secured to the bed frame. He tried to move, but it was useless. His head throbbed as he turned to see the room. Aute sat in a chair at the door, a Richtje beside her. Aute motioned and the girl came to his bed, touched his bandaged hand, smiled gently and then left the room.

"Hello, Pieter," Aute said cheerfully when the Richtje had gone. "Have a good sleep?" She brushed her hair back with her hand, but the feeling of dread it had first given failed to come this time. Strangely, he felt as if his finger was still on his hand, though he could see the gap when he looked at the bandages.

"Why?" he asked simply.

"Tied to the bed, Pieter? You're dangerous to the School. You tried to kill a Richtje. That can't happen," she said, her tone becoming harsh. "Besides, we must know where you are when we need you."

He looked at his hands, both of them this time, the bandaged one and the uninjured one. Richtje had cut him and now she was different. Not only had she killed, but she had mutilated someone, someone she knew. The rest of the Richtjes would have to have that same experience. It was too important to let only one feel it.

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How would it be to have only four fingers? How would they do it? Leave four on one hand, or two on each? He couldn't shout or scream, he could feel nothing. He would scream later, he thought, for somehow he felt he knew what was to be done.

He only wished he *had* sculpted a sixth demon for the piece in his workroom, for now there was little chance of holding a tool again. No clay, no oils, no watercolors. A whisper of a chill swept through him then and he wanted a cigarette.

"The Administrator will come to talk to you later." When Van Zeldt looked up, she went on. "Yes, he's the only other who knows. He will bring the Richtjes with him. You will be asked to sacrifice much, Pieter." She paused, crossing her legs delicately, brushing her hair back again. "But that is a father's duty, isn't it?"

He stared at her, his eyes clouded by the pain in his head. "Father?" he sighed, wishing he hadn't said the word.

"Father figure is closer. They admire you, Pieter, did you know that?" He mutely shook his head. "You are their favorite. They've always looked to you for guidance."

"And now?" he asked.

"And now they will learn sacrifice, Pieter. They've learned of death from me, but they'll learn the pain and horror of sacrifice from you."

The Richtjes learned from him, he thought, even though they were from Aute's cells. They were really his, not hers. His. He wanted to be sick.

"I won't do it," Van Zeldt said quietly.

"Yes, you will. Everything will be the same for the others," Aute said, again brushing her hair back. This time there was menace in the gesture. "You'll come to the park five more times, say the words you said last night, even lunge at the Richtje with an empty powerknife. The others will be terrified as the first one was." She paused. "You will, of course, lose another each time." Aute nodded to his wrapped hand.

"You're insane. I won't do it," he said again, his voice somehow still steady.

"Yes, you will, Pieter. Remember, I have been home since the War. Without the bonus, you will have to return there. I don't believe you can do that, Pieter. You'll give everything for that bonus."

He closed his eyes and saw the bodies, smelled the permeating odors. She was right. He could never go back. He knew, as he had since he'd waked, what he would do. Then he remembered the smooth unison the Richtjes showed when they carved clay, and

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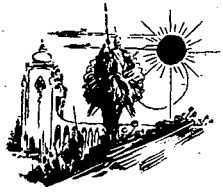
knew that each would react with the quickness of the one whose powerknife had first met his hand. There would be no hesitation in any of them.

And when the Richtjes came to his room and stood around his bed, the Administrator a shadow in the background, he fought down the screams and succeeded, almost. And as the demons, *his* demons, bent down to gaze at him, he reached out with a hand that was tied to the bed and touched the broken wing at his shoulder. ●



IAsfm Puzzle #15

From page 25

Solution to Exotic Locales

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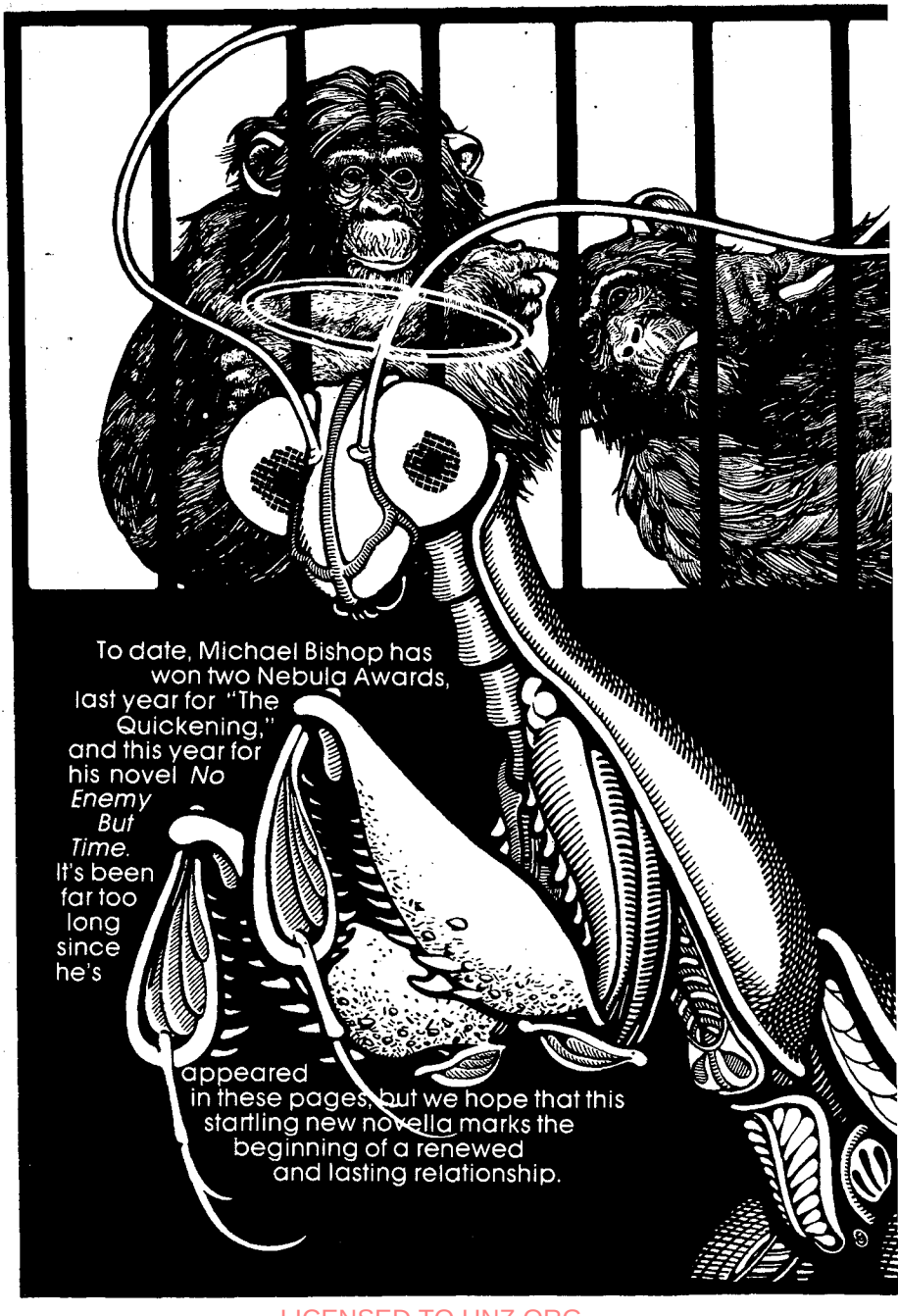
To date, Michael Bishop has won two Nebula Awards, last year for "The Quickening," and this year for his novel *No Enemy But Time*. It's been far too long since he's appeared in these pages, but we hope that this startling new novella marks the beginning of a renewed and lasting relationship.

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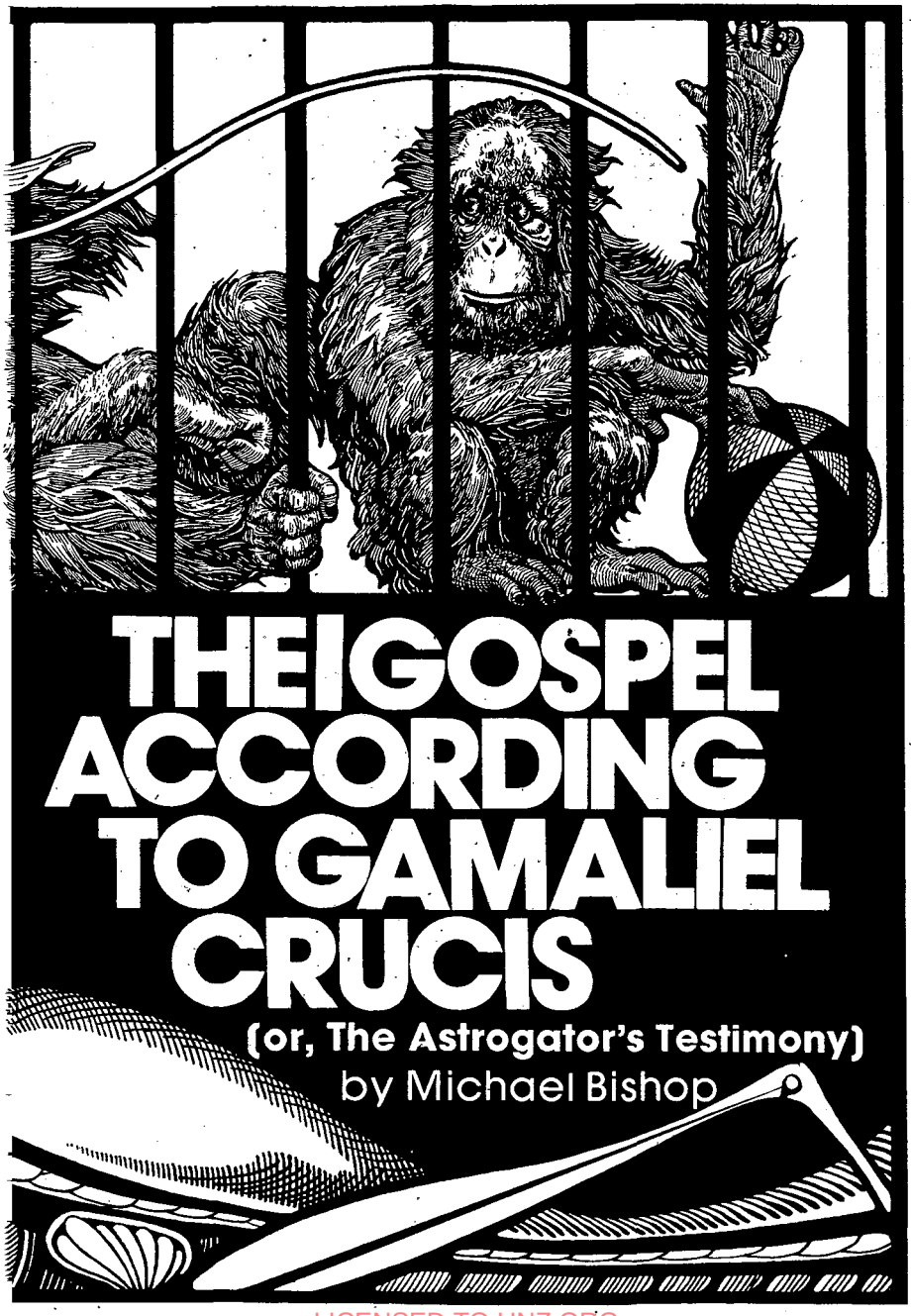

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GAMALIEL CRUCIS

(or, The Astrogator's Testimony)

by Michael Bishop

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CHAPTER 1

Gamaliel's prologue.

1 In that eventful year, O Humanity, the Twentieth Expeditionary Force, having been gone from our solar system nearly two decades, flung itself back through the empty substratum of outer space carrying aboard its vanguard vessel, *Pilgrim*, the kidnapped Redeemer of another race.

2 Gamaliel Rashba, later self-christened Crucis, was chief astrogator for the Twentieth. Here he sets down his testimony as witness to the transuniversal Mantic truth, and to the shameful treachery of his people's response, and to the Hope that yet abides and in whose promise we may reliably sustain our myriad private hopes.

3 At the homecoming of the Twentieth, the peoples of Earth and all her proximate satellites and colonies rejoiced; for only five of our earliest expeditions to much closer suns had returned, and those so many years ago that the memory of their success had inevitably begun to fade.

4 Four other caravans to distant stars were still en route, but the ten remaining fleets of humanity's most hopeful and arrogant outreach had perished altogether, saddening the vigilant human populations of their original solar system.

5 The rejoicing of the peoples at the homecoming of the Twentieth, then, briefly united them. Celebration triumphed over long-standing blood hatreds, territorial disputes, politico-religious conflicts, and a host of newer disagreements that the members of the *Pilgrim* and her sister ships had not foreseen or imagined.

6 But these fragile reconciliations did not last, for what is fragile must eventually break, and with the resumption of the old feuds and enmities a glare like nova-light began to illuminate the astonishing nonhuman cargo brought to Earth aboard the *Pilgrim*.

7 To the hallowed disagreements, both old and new, enflaming the passions of humankind, was added the disruptive power of a Savior stolen from the insectile peoples of the fifth planet of the far-off Alpha Crucis binary.

8 Stolen, indeed, with their blessing, kidnapped with their active connivance; for they had other Redeemers in plenty, and by what the crew of the Twentieth told them about conditions Earthward it seemed to the intelligences of this world that humanity had need of at least one of their irritating surplus.

The alien Messiah introduced.

9 And this was the being whom Gamaliel and the others called *Lady Mantid,* or *Gottesanbeterin,* or *prie-Dieu,* or *God-horse,* or

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Mistress, and many other names redolent of awe or respect, depending of course on their birthplaces and the idioms of their native tongues.

10 A being whom some small number of those aboard the *Pilgrim* slowly came to know as an alien essence consubstantial with the Second Person of the long-discredited Nicene Trinity. (That Gamaliel adopted this point of view surprised him as much as, or even more than, it surprised those who knew his background and personal history.)

11 This, then, was the Alphacrucian Christ, a female mantid of untoward delicacy and strength, easily as large as the largest Russian wolfhound, in color a lovely avocado, in movement a clockwork ballerina, full of both strangeness and grace, ever glittering at the eye.

12 "Call me Mantikhoras," she herself had said in her mellifluous, feminine way, in the passenger hold of the *Pilgrim*. "For I am the man-eater whose appetite means not death but regeneration, and you, Gamaliel, are he whose duty it is to satisfy your species' hunger by continually satisfying mine."

13 This saying frightened more of the astrogator's colleagues and subordinates than it comforted or converted; and from that day forward Gamaliel championed the divine mission of the six-legged creature only at his most wary discretion and almost always at his peril.

Presentation to the press.

14 Into the half-empty Sheol of Cleveland, Ohio, capital city of the Multipartite Union of North America, the officers of the Twentieth Expeditionary Force took their alien charge to a meeting with the scribes and superstars of the Pan-Solar Press. (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington had been obliterated during the opening salvos of the Cobalt Galas, eighty-odd years ago.)

15 At the sight of Mantikhoras all these formidable personages fell back in disbelief, and perhaps a dozen swooned: but among the first to recover was the CABLE-STAR holocaster Rachelka Dan, who pressed forward to gaze upon the mantid and to machine-gun her questions.

16 She directed most of these at Captain H.K. Bajaj, leader of the Twentieth: "How did you come to take the creature from its world? Does it understand the geopolitical standoff prevailing here on Earth or the iffy intercolonial relationships structuring the politics of Sunspace? What does it think of Cleveland?"

17 And Rachelka Dan also asked, "Has the alien freely con-

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sented to this interview? Why have you chosen this time and this particular forum to introduce it to humanity? Does it speak?" And an array of similar questions too numerous to detail.

18 Captain Bajaj replied, "This meeting takes place here and now by order of the Interstellar Diplomatic Instrument for Outreach, Trade, and Study, the selfsame global authority that has mounted every extrasolar expedition to date."

19 Whereupon Gamaliel the Astrogator spoke up, saying, "Never fear. The mantid learned human languages, history, and cultural lore en route from Acrux V. She does indeed speak, friends, but her hour isn't come yet."

20 "Her hour for what?" clamored the scribes and holocasters, many of whom were astounded that Gamaliel had identified the mantid as female. "She looks like a big green bug, but you make it sound like she has some overwhelming apocalyptic message for our worlds."

21 "*M. religiosa crucensis*," Gamaliel corrected them. "Family Mantidae, order Dictyoptera, substance Divine. Please don't call her a 'big green bug.' By the way, those of you who fainted a moment ago have certainly become brave in the wake of Ms. Dan's questioning."

22 Chastened in this wise, some of the scribes and holocasters mumbled among themselves, thinking to repay the astrogator by ridiculing his belief in the supernatural origins of the insect. "Are you the bug's disciple?" one of them asked. "Do you propose our immediate conversion to High Buggery?"

23 These remarks prompted much profane laughter and raillery, so much that Captain Bajaj made a gesture indicating the imminent termination of the interview.

24 "I am indeed the Alphacrucian's disciple!" Gamaliel shouted above the din. "I confess it to every nation, satellite, and colony!"

25 The noise abated a little, and Rachelka Dan, turning to the captain, asked, "Has the mantid made other disciples among the officers and crew of the Twentieth? Or is your astrogator alone in this startling declaration of faith?"

26 Said Captain Bajaj, his eyes cast down as if in embarrassment, "At least two others on the *Pilgrim* share his perspective: Andrew Stout, the medical officer, and Priscilla Muthinga, our assistant xenologist. How many others share their view I'm not prepared to say." And he strode from the dais to escape further probing.

Mantikhoras quiets the throng.

27 Bedlam ensued, and neither Gamaliel nor any of the re-

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maining five officers could impose order on the chaos: so that even the mantid on the platform began to stalk from side to side, adding to the dismay of many and therefore to the noise.

28 In a voice of porcelain purity and tremulant timbre the mantid cried aloud, "Give heed a moment to Gamaliel!" This command draped silence on the throng, being so unexpected; and everyone gazed up at the creature in awe and amazement.

29 And Gamaliel, the way having been prepared for him, stepped to the middle of the platform and in impassioned tones began to address the peoples of every nation, satellite, and colony, declaring:

CHAPTER 2

Planetfall on Acrux V.

1 "This mantid is the Messiah, the Anointed One long ago promised the Jews, and though I have come to believe in her as a child of Abraham, I see that even those in Peter's church and its schismatic heirs may also believe, for she and the problematic Jesus are of the same essence as The One.

2 "On Acrux V, you see, we happened to put down during the messianic mission of Lady Mantid and her sibling saviors, an accident that The One in loving repudiation of the godly attribute of all-knowingness did nothing to prevent.

3 "The people of this world are thinking insects, self-aware Mantidae, but like us fallen from the primeval Garden into Sin and Death: for which reason The One sent unto them a Holy Family of vermiform larvae.

4 "Each of these hatchlings, be it noted, emerged from the same encompassing egg case, or *ootheca*, which itself was extruded by a virgin mantid blessed with fecundity by the inspiriting touch of the Transuniversal Holy Ghost.

5 "Acrux V crawls with sentient creatures, all of whom reproduce in the immemorial orthopteran fashion; and for the Daughter of Mantid, our Mantikhoras, to appear among them as the *solitary* issue of a gravid egg case would violate the covenant of their biology and the expectations of their culture."

Rachelka Dan interrupts.

6 At which point Rachelka Dan broke in, saying, "Do you mean to tell us that God—or The One, if you prefer that designation—sent an entire SWAT team of Messiahs to the Alphacrucians?" An inquiry that provoked another minor uproar among the representatives of the Pan-Solar Press.

7 Having returned to the platform from the corridor, Captain

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Bajaj lifted his hand and declared, "This is something that a Hindu such as myself may easily understand, and if the lady from CABLE-STAR does not object, I will explain the matter."

8 With the holocaster's ready consent the captain resumed, saying, "The avatars of Vishnu are many. Although they are not so many as the incarnations of divinity sent as siblings to the Alphacrucians, even Mahatma Ghandi once asked a Christian missionary why God, if He had one son, did not have another and another."

9 Concluded the captain, "On Acrux V, I fear, God had so many children that like the old woman in the nursery rhyme he didn't know what to do." The press corps howled gleefully at this remark, and Captain Bajaj, shaking his head, stepped aside for Gamaliel.

The astrogator's narrative resumed.

10 Thus bolstered, the astrogator continued his story: "Some of the hundreds of nymphs emerging from the holy ootheca, there in the bleak, rocky desert of their homeland, fell upon and devoured one another, an orthopteran biological impulse that reduced their number to a couple of hundred or so.

11 "If you like, call this postnatal feast a celebration of the Eucharist, or the First Supper, or Unruly Communion, or any other term that seems to you appropriate.

12 "But remember that if The One wished Its insectile offspring to be both fully mantid and fully divine, these teeming nymphal incarnations were altogether necessary; therefore The One accomplished them."

13 ("Yecch," said a holocaster near the dais, whose colleagues first shushed and then snidely ridiculed him.)

14 Gamaliel spoke more, saying, "We arrived while Mantikhoras and her surviving egg-mates, long since grown from wingless nymphs to adults capable of flight, were whirring from one Alphacrucian hamlet to another, preaching the gospel and healing the afflicted and doing other miraculous things that we of the Twentieth were not always privileged to witness.

15 "This evangelism enraged the duly established queens and councils of that world, by openly challenging the status quo and thus appearing to threaten their authority, actions deemed by the rulers as crimes of a religious as well as a secular cast.

16 "Our advent further confused the situation: but because many of the male saviors gave in to mantid lust and so suffered decapitation at the jaws of their otherwise sated brides, day by day the ranks of the divine siblings were thinned, leaving only

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females to continue the program on which The One had dispatched them.

17 "Disturbed by the ongoing mission of even these remaining rabbis, down now to sixty or seventy in all, the most powerful Alphacrucian rulers sought to enlist the aid of some of us from the Twentieth in curbing their evangelical activity;

18 "For we were often at court with the rulers, observing their ways and exchanging data, and they supposed us sympathetic to their position vis-à-vis the disruptive influence of the barnstorming redeemers.

19 "Intellectually keen but technologically backward, the Alphacrucian rulers perhaps saw us as harbingers of their own material evolution, provided, of course, that the evangels were prevented from plunging the people at large back into the toils of superstition and from encouraging in them a hopeless egalitarianism."

20 Cried an annoyed holocaster, "This is getting thick, Gamaliel! Why don't you come to the point?"

21 The astrogator replied, "The point is that after half a revolution of Acrux V around its primary, we decided that our presence was itself an anomalous factor in the life of that world, and so made plans to depart, symbolically washing our hands of any complicity in the fate of either the rulers or the evangels.

22 "Said the preeminent elder of the preeminent Alphacrucian council, 'If you don't take one of the self-proclaimed Daughters of Mantid with you as an object of study, she'll certainly die with the others when, for their crimes of cultic blasphemy and civil agitation, we arrest and devour them.'

23 "And the elder added, his wide-set eyes aglitter, 'We're glad to let a people as advanced as you but so poor in offspring per couple borrow one of our impertinent redeemers,' around which last word it was impossible not to hear a set of scornful quotation marks.

24 "This elder, you see, had once visited Andrew Stout's surgery aboard the *Pilgrim* and probably believed that we would subject our messianic passenger to vivisection, dismemberment, and microscopic examination, the end result being her death.

25 "Instead we accepted the offer as a means of preserving the creature's life and of fulfilling our tripartite responsibility as bona fide concessionaires of the Interstellar Diplomatic Instrument for Outreach, Trade, and Study.

26 "And on our voyage home from the Alpha Crucis binary the being whom we now call either Lady Mantid or Mantikhoras

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convinced me of her godly descent by her fierce serenity, and by her all-encompassing intellect, and by a modest array of signs and wonders."

27 Snapped Rachelka Dan, "Details, please! Details!"

Lady Mantid buttresses the emptiness.

28 And Gamaliel replied, "On one occasion on our voyage through the empty substratum beneath the vacuum proper, Mantikhoras stretched forth a forelimb and healed a tiny rent in an exterior bulkhead through which the lethal force of nothingness had begun to seep."

29 A holocaster upbraided the astrogator, saying, "A patch would have done as well. In many cases miracles give birth to faith, but here I'm afraid your faith has given birth to a miracle."

30 "On another occasion," Gamaliel responded, "pleased that I had pledged to her discipleship, Lady Mantid granted me a glimpse of the deathly void that belief in The One through the mediation of her person would vanquish utterly.

31 "This she did by standing alone with me in an aft compartment of the *Pilgrim* and saying to the ship's inanimate constituent parts, '*Away!*'

32 "Whereupon every bulkhead disappeared, and every crew member was visible to me as a living marionette hanging in the substanceless dark, seemingly without support and completely unaware of the vast self-centered emptiness in which they danced.

33 "Frightened and deathly cold, I collapsed: but Mantikhoras lifted me again and said, 'This is the domain of death, for which the starless, transdimensional realm of the substratum beneath the void is only an elegant allegory.

34 " 'Here, however, not even an astrogator has power to move or maneuver, for no stars shine. And what point is there in changing places within an emptiness that is everywhere the same and everywhere inhospitable?

35 " 'Just as you plot the *Pilgrim's* path through the spatial substratum to the light, Gamaliel, I guide those who deliver themselves to me, for I am that which gives shape to the formless: the bone in the body, the struts in the solar sail.'

36 "And Mantikhoras said another word, restoring the walls of the vessel and putting a deck beneath my feet again: so that I knew this miracle for a parable as well as a prodigy, and I straightway handed myself over."

37 Then Captain Bajaj went to the podium to announce that all questioning must cease, and the scribes and holocasters cried in

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one voice, "Is your astrogator lying? Did others experience this? What's *your* explanation of the matter?"

38 To which the captain answered, "An hallucination, my friends. The substratum is the very province of hallucinations."

39 Neither Gamaliel nor Lady Mantid had any chance to counter the captain's argument, for the party from the Twentieth was ushered from the room, the mantid ambling in her monarchial, clockwork way and the astrogator hurrying to remain abreast of her.

40 Whispered a colleague to Rachelka Dan, "What do you think Thaddeus Thorogood and the New Testament Revivalists are going to make of this development, huh? Not one among us had sense enough to raise the question, but it's probably the most important one there is."

41 "Amen," said Rachelka Dan under her breath. "This adventure is only beginning. Mark my words, mark my words."

CHAPTER 3

1 After this dramatic introduction, the Interstellar Diplomatic Instrument set Mantikhoras apart from both humanity and the Pan-Solar Press, and not even Captain Bajaj or Gamaliel the Astrogator knew where; for it was decided in high places that the mantid must undergo further study and swear earthly allegiance to the disarranged government of the Multipartite Union of North America.

2 This she apparently did without delay or qualm, resting her spirit in the saying (perhaps apocryphal), Render unto temporal powers the inconsequential and unto The One that which truly counts.

Mantikhoras's cross-country flight.

3 In some wise, however, the mantid obtained her release and set off under her own power for the California amusement park where she knew Andrew Stout, Priscilla Muthinga, Nicholas Morowitz, and Gamaliel, disciples all, had escaped from the moth-balled *Pilgrim* for some well-earned R & R.

4 During this flight Mantikhoras looked down on the ruined cities, cratered farms, polluted rivers, slumped mountains, blighted forests, scarred hills, and pale dead lakes of the M.U.N.A., marveling that amid such desolation the people continued to support—over and above all other enterprises—professional sports stadia and a bewildering variety of gaudy playlands.

5 A squadron of battered scoopjets escorted Mantikhoras from her place of detention (Pelee Island, Lake Erie) to Kansas City,

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Missouri, where simple curiosity induced the mantid to descend to observe the people riding rollercoasters, log rafts, and bump'em cars in the meticulously restored ruins of an ancient theme park.

6 Upon seeing the alien visitor, those enjoying the amusements grew agitated, pointing and running and sometimes even catcalling at her; for they recognized her from the holocasts, while she in turn felt compassion for their many deformities and the bitterness of their bewilderment in the face of such afflictions.

7 And there in the park she took many small children for brief flights, and talked with their parents, and answered the hatred of the most vocal bigots with kindness and humor, but purposely refrained from performing any miracles.

8 But at last the park officials asked her to go, declaring that she had taken profits from the ice-cream and soft-drink vendors, and had also frightened hundreds of small children into believing that a monster was loose on the grounds: an accusation with only a flimsy shadow of truth.

9 Undismayed, Mantikhoras bade her new friends adieu and departed, taking care to continue her journey westward at a treetop altitude that, by thwarting easy radar detection, enabled her to elude the noise and pomp of her unasked-for scoopjet escort.

10 And so she whirred over wheat fields and cattle lots, through eroded gulleys and diseased stands of cottonwoods; and frequently along her route she was aware of radioactive hot spots, and always she was struck by the numbers of malformed people and animals inhabiting the blasted continent.

11 Over the Oklahoma panhandle a rancher in a buckboard knocked her out of the sky with a double-barreled discharge from a 12-gauge, peppering her right wing with birdshot: so that she tumbled to earth into an arroyo reeking of alkali but so high-banked and twisty that it prevented her from being discovered for the coup de grâce.

12 "*I* am the coup de grâce," said Mantikhoras to the cloudless heavens; "*I* am the stroke of mercy. Indeed, *I* am the gracious death that opens a gate into paradise." But there was no one to hear her.

13 Nor could she depart by air, for her wing was broken, and she settled in for the night, asking forgiveness for her assailant on the grounds that to him she must surely have resembled the vanguard of a truly prodigious plague of locusts.

The temptation in the wilderness.

14 Thus began her adventure in the wilderness, where she stayed forty days, praying continually, hallucinating pleasant

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Alphacrucian landscapes, and slaking her thirst on the brackish reservoirs of moisture in various succulent cactic and discarded diet-cola cans.

15 At last there appeared to Lady Mantid, either in the flesh or in the dreams of her fever, a figure in greasy khaki, unshaven and ill-shod, whose eyes looked like shriveled raisins; and this apparition invited her into his rattletrap vehicle and put to her many disheartening proposals:

16 "Come with me to Vegas, baby, and we'll split the take sixty-forty, me on the up side for providin' the transporation; or maybe fifty-fifty if it looks like you're gonna be a *really* big hit."

17 And carrying Mantikhoras out of Oklahoma into New Mexico, the driver enumerated the likely rewards to both of them of a night-club routine at Nero's Bistro on the Strip, particularly if the mantid did not disdain to do wonders.

18 Said the would-be impresario, "You know, make the whole goddamn hotel disappear the way you did that spaceship. Then, jus' when everybody's good 'n' scared, slap it back around 'em and keep 'em from crappin' their drawers.

19 "Or maybe we could push a whole battery of slot machines up there on stage and you could sorta pray up a jackpot on ever' single one of 'em, which the management'd like 'cause it'd probably make the suckers believe the same thing's possible out there in the casinos."

20 Mantikhoras, hypnotized by both the heatwaves rising from the asphalt and the baffling incantations on the driver's lips, made no reply.

21 Noticing her silence, the pitchman said, "There's more than silver to get out of this, baby. There's booze, and baubles, and, uh, whatever turns you on. Maybe we could round up a bugbox of dragonflies or somepin and just sorta shake 'em out in your bed, hey?"

22 And "Stop the car, let me out," Mantikhoras said. "This isn't my mission": so that, thus rebuked, the angry driver shoved her out the door without stopping and sped off down the deserted highway into the next sun-baked adobe town.

The calf.

23 As the Alphacrucian rolled into yet another gulley, she realized that her tempter had been a living creature rather than a dream, and she hungered mightily, not only for food but for solace;

24 Whereupon a blind calf with two heads came unto her in the

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arroyo, bleating tenderly and nuzzling her thorax; and she stroked the beast with her forelimbs, saying,

25 "Because of the evil done against you by your masters, who are themselves blind, I bequeath unto you with these words a *rational soul*, and all the responsibilities and perquisites attending that gift."

26 By this speech the calf's tongues were loosed, and it said, both heads speaking together, "If I'm now in honorary possession of a rational soul, I beg you to devour me for thy name's sake, that I may inherit the kingdom"; for the calf had immediately perceived the deeper identity of the Alphacrucian.

27 Mantikhoras wept.

28 And said to the two-headed calf, "Before I do, I must restore your sight," which she did at once: so that the calf beheld the first stars glimmering in the dusk and bleated at them in heart-rending admiration and gratitude.

29 Embracing the creature, Mantikhoras assuaged her hunger, leaving the hides and hooves as offerings to The One (whose proxies tonight were a flock of circling vultures); and the spirit of the ennobled calf ascended straightway into heaven.

Reunion with the disciples.

30 Now the forty days were ended, a period during which helicopters, highway patrolmen, and units of the Civil Air Patrol had crisscrossed the western half of the continent in search of her; and Mantikhoras, having escaped both discovery and rescue, took flight again.

31 Yet farther to the west, in the opulent amusement park called Magic Kingdom VII, Gamaliel and his fellow believers from the Twentieth had grown weary of the rigors of their protracted R & R.

32 Said Priscilla Muthinga to the others, "I've enjoyed just about all of this I can stand," at which remark an employee in the getup of an ill-tempered Dwarf poked her in the ankle with a stick designed for retrieving litter.

33 Seeing this attack, Gamaliel made Priscilla put forth her other leg so that the Dwarf could poke it in the ankle, too: whereupon he and his comrades-in-faith disarmed the park employee and warned him firmly of the likely consequences of his ever again abusing their turn-the-other-ankle piety.

34 "I'm sick of this place, Gamaliel," said Andrew Stout when the Dwarf had slunk away. "Why don't we flick over to Hawaii for a round of Frisbee golf or maybe some out-of-body surfing in etheric wetsuits by Bloomingdale & Sears?"

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35 Cried the others, "I'm for that, I'm for that!" and even Gamaliel found himself doubting the survival of their Mistress and wavering quite alarmingly in his allegiance to the code of discipleship.

36 But just when he was preparing to consent to the others' frivolous plans, they all heard a buzzing of wings and Mantikhoras herself came swooping down upon them from over the great, pseudo-glacial peak of a fiberglass mountain three hundred feet high.

38 Said Lady Mantid, landing near her followers, "The task is at hand. Come, let's get to work."

CHAPTER 4

On the air.

1 Not long after this Mantikhoras appeared on a pan-solar broadcast of the holoprogram *Parsecs Ahead*, hosted by Rachelka Dan before a live studio audience in a dilapidated CABLE-STAR facility in Burbank, California.

2 The topic of the evening was the alleged divinity of the visitor from Acrux V, and the producers of the program had assembled not only Lady Mantid herself but also the team of scientists who had studied her on Pelee Island during her enforced confinement after the press conference in Cleveland, Ohio.

3 Although Gamaliel and the others strongly recommended that their Mistress refrain from appearing on *Parsecs Ahead*, fearing that the debate would turn into a sideshow staged and manipulated by the skillful Ms. Dan, Mantikhoras rebuked them for worrywarts, saying,

4 "Isn't it likely that the Daughter of Mantid, having witnessed manipulations of much greater magnitude than anything you're going to see here, understands exactly what she's about?"

5 Therefore she went on the program, and in her opening interview with Rachelka Dan, while steadfastly refusing to identify herself as anything other than an intelligent mantid, astonished everyone with the precision and poetry of her speech.

6 Rachelka Dan pursued the matter, saying, "But the astrogator aboard the Twentieth claims greater things for you, and on your flight from Cleveland or wherever to Anaheim, which took you a surprisingly long time, it's rumored that you stopped in several small communities to demonstrate your, uh, well, your *powers*."

7 To which the mantid replied, "The only nonhuman power I've demonstrated to date is that of unassisted flight, a capability I

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share with every other self-aware adult on my distant world of origin."

8 And the host of *Parsecs Ahead* declared, "Tellingly, Lady Mantid, a world whose leadership rejected you and sent you home with the Twentieth as a kind of insidious revolutionary, a bad seed they preferred to see planted in the exhausted but well-turned soil of Good Old Earth.

9 "Is it any wonder, then, that some of us suspect your intentions and think your most ardent supporters are dupes of the ruling Alphacrucians? Perhaps you're here to undermine the very foundations of our lives."

10 And Mantikhoras said, much to the uneasiness of her disciples on the premises, "If I've come to undermine your lives, I've done so only to buttress your humanity and to elevate your questing spirits."

11 On this pronouncement Ms. Dan pounced with both feet: "So that subversion *is* your mission, isn't it? At last you admit it. And you also hint at a superhuman—a supernatural—motive that earlier you denied."

12 Mantikhoras's antennae quivered in gnomic acknowledgment, but otherwise she did not reply.

13 After a series of commercial messages (for, among other things, a round-trip vacation package to Ganymede, a do-it-yourself bioengineering kit, and a handy pocket Geiger counter), Ms. Dan introduced a panel of government scientists and another of independent theologians, all of whom professed to understand the mantid's genetic and spiritual makeup.

14 Dr. Millard Crews, an alien anatomist who had never even visited the Galapagos Islands, declared that Mantikhoras had an outsized orthopteran body and an unusual tripartite brain whose like he had never encountered before; nevertheless, he felt reasonably certain that the creature was indeed a creature and not an avatar of divinity.

15 Dr. Scheherezade Tabataba'i, late of the University of Isfahan, scoffed at the notion that Mantikhoras represented the long-awaited Shiite *mahdi*, recovered from her "occultation" by the crew of the Twentieth; the Islamic theologian also rejected as clumsy and unconvincing the mantid's impersonation of the Judeo-Christian Messiah.

16 Dr. Joe Bob Newcombe, president of West Texas New Testament Revivalist College in El Paso, told the program's pan-solar audience that the mantid's very existence was an insult to

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God and that her manifold blasphemies here on *Parsecs Ahead* warranted nothing short of deportation and probably a lot worse.

17 Other "experts" testified that the Alphacrucian was a) a spectacular special effect, b) a powerful argument for either atheism or credulity, c) an extraterrestrial analogue of the scarab beetle sacred to the ancient Egyptians, d) an orthopteran half-wit released into our custody by her own irresponsible people, or e) a genius banished from Acrux V for her innovative social ideas.

The L.G. Kroeber psychoscope.

18 At last Dr. Felipe Novello, a licensed psychoscopist and moderately well-known depth-oneiromancer, overrode the others by declaring that he for one accepted the divine nature of the mantid, and that he had what amounted to credible scientific proof of her divinity.

19 Rachelka Dan accosted the man with a microphone: "All right, then, Dr. Novello, let's have it: the worlds are waiting."

20 Said her guest, "The unconscious of an entity identical with the Supreme Being in almost every respect but that of spiritual ubiquity would present an unparalleled challenge to a depth-oneiromancer, wouldn't you agree? Well, it does, and I accepted the challenge."

21 "What Dr. Novello is trying to say," Rachelka Dan explained, "is that a peek inside the dreaming mind of a creaturely projection of God, or The One, would be a small assault on the mind of God itself."

22 Dr. Novello nodded his qualified assent to this paraphrase of his own statement, and a pair of mechanical stagehands rolled a gleaming L.G. Kroeber psychoscope onto the ramshackle set of *Parsecs Ahead*.

23 Said the psychoscopist, going to the machine, "I will now replay for you a holotape of the Uncon dimension of Mantikhoras's mental activity during a four-hour sleep period at our research facility on [site of facility *bleeped* from broadcast]. I'll run the tape at twenty times our original recording speed to stay within stipulated programming limits."

24 And the three-dimensional screen, or video well, of the psychoscope filled with an inchoate fog, a formlessness as deep and all-pervasive as that of the substratum beneath the interstellar void; and this inchoate fog began to shimmer and quake in basso-profundo registers of silence that every viewer felt in his or her bones.

25 And all that came thereafter no one watching could chronicle or synopsize, for to some it seemed that nothing more occurred

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at all; while to others the psychoscope revealed a pageant of cosmogenesis so rapid and minutely detailed that different images leapt out and utterly preoccupied different people.

26 Gamaliel, for instance, found himself stirring inside the sticky skin of a terrestrial *M. religiosa* just prior to its intermediate molt, stalks of grass towering around him like sequoias and every clod of dirt a miniature Gibraltar.

27 Meanwhile, Andrew Stout waltzed in stately lunar orbit around a planetary gas giant in another galaxy; and Priscilla, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, darted here and there over the gleaming hide of a hammerhead shark, cleansing it of near-invisible parasites.

28 What other onlookers excerpted and experienced only those others could say, but it was everywhere as distinct and singular as it was vivid: a kaleidoscope of images, an infinitely vast smorgasbord from which to pick and choose.

29 At last the video well of the L.G. Kroeber psychoscope began to incandesce, radiating a powerful white light that united the audience of *Parsecs Ahead* in an overwhelming blaze of phosphor-dots and motile phosphenes.

30 And Mantikhoras spoke into this light, saying, "Remember what blinds you, and look through it, and on the other side you will certainly see that which has been there from the beginning."

31 Many voices cried out in alarm, and the psychoscope exploded, showering sparks, and Rachelka Dan shouted, "Cut to our test pattern!" and *Parsecs Ahead* went off the air in a roar of incandescence that ruined the holosets of three quarters of CABLESTAR's clientele.

Escape from the studio.

32 Said Felipe Novello, "See what I mean?" but the uproar in the studio among both his colleagues and the audience rendered his question inaudible; and the Daughter of Mantid hitched her way unmolested from the building to the parking lot, where Gamaliel and the others had taken refuge.

33 It was twelve-thirty in the morning, and clear, but none of Lady Mantid's followers could see the stars for the nimbus of celestial brightness lingering on their retinae from the exploded psychoscope: so that the disciples felt themselves floating along as if in a perfusing billow of squid ink.

34 When they complained of this, Mantikhoras said, "Out of blindness, sight"; and led them from Burbank into the desert, where the stars reemerged, and there they spent the night talking

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of eternity, suffering, discipleship, and the mutability of holocast ratings.

CHAPTER 5

Rachelka Dan converted.

1 After this Mantikhoras went the length and breadth of the habitable continent, visiting hospitals, amusement parks, sports stadia, gambling casinos (even Nero's Bistro), military bases, zoos, and other mutant reservations.

2 Her successful appearance on *Parsecs Ahead* made her instantly recognizable and instantly welcome wherever she went (excluding only the heartland of Thaddeus Thorogood's New Testament Revivalists); and she dispensed comfort or miracles as each situation warranted.

3 Rachelka Dan was the mantid's newest and most ardent convert; and she and Gamaliel the Astrogator often acted as the Alphacrucian's advance team, preceding their winged Mistress to each new site and arranging both interviews and lodging.

4 Jews by birth and upbringing, Rachelka and Gamaliel together reached the conclusion that Mantikhoras was not necessarily a new incarnation of the God-in-man esteemed by the tattered remnants of contemporary Christendom, but instead the Suffering Servant prophesied in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.

5 For in the verses of this chapter it is said of the servant "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty we should desire him," which descriptions had some seeming reference to the image of the mantid in the eyes of a narrow-souled humanity.

6 Or, if not the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, then perhaps the Son of man in the visionary seventh chapter of Daniel, whose "dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away."

7 For these were the Messianic possibilities that did not conflict with the faith of their childhoods, and that likewise conformed both to the portrait of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and to that in Daniel of the Son of man riding to glory on a heavenly thundercloud.

8 Said Gamaliel to Rachelka, "Of course I never expected to escort the Messiah to Earth aboard the *Pilgrim*, but I infinitely prefer that sort of commonplace arrival to the Messiah's advent in an apocalyptic blitzkrieg that signals all-out warfare between, uh, Good and Evil."

9 "Although I never believed in a warrior Messiah or in a Levite priest-king come to cleanse us of our sins," replied Rachelka, "the

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mind of Mantikhoras is clearly that of God, and I'm committed to her as both captive and lover."

10 Uncertainty and bashfulness stayed Gamaliel's tongue (shore leave on Acrux V had done little to improve his social graces), and for several weeks during these exciting travels he went to bed in motel rooms next to Rachelka's struggling to square his lust with his admiration for her and his devotion to the Cause.

11 He hoped that Rachelka would become *his* captive and *his* lover, for he wanted her to continue with him in their common ministry not merely as a fellow disciple but as his wife.

Miraculous cures.

12 Meanwhile, Mantikhoras toured the radiation-sickness wards of special sanatoria for fallout victims, and held audiences with cancer patients whose malignancies were inoperable, and sought out on every medical front sufferers whose physicians had numbered their days and despaired of ever curing anyone similarly afflicted.

13 Gamaliel saw the Daughter of Mantid pray with a man whose bone marrow showed up on thermoscans as fiery rivers of strontium 90: an hour later the radioactivity had departed, and the blood-cell count had stabilized at a normal level.

14 The astrogator also witnessed the Alphacrucian drive a cancer that had metastasized through the liver and lights of a two-year-old girl into a lump of phlegm, which the child promptly disgorged and the doctors just as promptly doused with alcohol and burned in a chromium bedpan.

15 On yet another occasion, in a hovel on the wolf-ridden periphery of Tacoma, Washington, Mantikhoras embraced a woman in the last stages of rabies and before the day was out had her cheerfully taking food and planning a visit to Tucson.

16 Everywhere that the mantid and her entourage went, then, people pressed forward with their misshapen bodies, their unlikely diseases, and their hungry spirits, looking for straightening, or remedy, or nourishment; for those whom Mantikhoras had healed since her appearance on *Parsecs Ahead* were legion.

17 But certain supplicants she turned away, saying, "Your own people have the knowledge and wherewithal to cure you"; whereupon Andrew Stout would come forward with a referral to the appropriate specialist or clinic, and Priscilla Muthinga with enough money to pay for the necessary treatments.

The ungrateful petitioner.

18 Once, a young double-amputee advised to apply for lifelike prosthetics from a Swiss bioengineering firm, and funded on the

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spot for these devices, berated Mantikhoras for her heartlessness, shouting,

19 "You don't give a damn about my disability, do you? You've got wings! That I've been legless almost my entire life doesn't mean shit to you, does it? Does it, you goddamn overgrown *grasshopper?*"

20 Andrew, who was for dumping the petitioner from his wheelchair, grew red-faced pointing out to the young man the powerful likelihood that his missing limbs were a visible sign of his spiritual poverty.

21 But Mantikhoras silenced Andrew by lifting her papery wings and saying to the bitter one, "I'd give these to you, young man, if they would do you any good. However, it's not upon fleshly wings that you'll mount from your affliction to fulfillment, but instead upon the wings of your own faith in my ministry."

22 Cried the man in the wheelchair, sneering his contempt and scorn, "What a crock of bullshit!"

23 And Mantikhoras, bowing her head, asked her followers to wrench her wings from her body and give them to the man as an offering of both love and commitment, which drastic deed Gamaliel and the others could not bring themselves to perform.

24 Angry with them for refusing her, the mantid appealed to the crowd, at last prevailing upon two bikers from Birmingham, Alabama, to step forward and rip her wings from her prothorax. As they obeyed, both men wore nervous grins, for they were unsure of the propriety of this duly-authorized mutilation.

25 Then said Mantikhoras to the double-amputee, "I'm giving you my wings not as replacements for your legs, but as tokens of my willingness to share your suffering."

26 Still unrepentant, the young man answered, "I couldn't never fly, and I'm still not gonna be able to walk. What good's you goin' and givin' up your stupid wings gonna do me or anybody else?"

27 Turning again to the bikers, Mantikhoras asked them to separate her praying forelimbs from her body, which request, although Gamaliel and the others argued vehemently against it, the two men appeared ready enough to honor.

28 At last the bitter young man in the wheelchair cried, "Keep your own goddamn legs, goddammit! You're not gonna stick me with that guilt trip, too!" And he propelled himself out of the crowd, carrying with him Andrew's referral and Priscilla's cashier's check.

29 And Priscilla said, "Mistress, your sacrifice was wasted on that one. He'd rather have the entire world in wheelchairs than

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walk again himself. He spared you your forelimbs not from any kindness but instead to keep from having their loss forever on his conscience."

30 To which the mantid replied, "A judgment that confirms the fact that he possesses one."

On conscience.

31 Later, when Mantikhoras and her disciples had walked apart to a secluded place, she said, "Conscience is God's most precious gift to rational souls, and I'm here to tell you that there is *no* rational soul upon whom The One has failed to bestow it.

32 "Some may put the gift in a drawer, or shove it into a closet and cover it over with coats, toys, and boardgames: but when the drawer is finally opened or the closet set to rights, the gift's still there, cobwebbed perhaps but otherwise ready for use."

33 For every eight or ten disciples attracted by Lady Mantid's miracles of healing, or unselfishness, or wordless aura of authority, her occasional commentaries on these acts (see, for instance, Gamaliel 5:31–32) almost always led one or two other converts to backslide or defect.

34 Repelled by parabolic statement or embarrassed by what they misperceived as pious talk, these squeamish followers drifted away, with the result that Mantikhoras sometimes questioned the faithful about the efficacy of her methods and consequently earned the mistrust of a few by appearing to doubt herself.

35 "Maybe I'm going about this wrong," she would say. "This just doesn't seem to be an age for beatitudes or parables."

36 Once, then, Rachelka Dan sought to justify the Daughter of Mantid's periodic bouts of self-questioning by reminding a group of adherents grumbling among themselves at poolside in a luxury hotel in Omaha that humanity had borrowed its Messiah from another sentient species in another solar system.

37 Said Rachelka to the grumblers, "It's sometimes very hard for her. Allowances must be made."

38 Responded one of this throng, "Room allowances, you mean! Mantikhoras always takes the bridal suite or some other plushy pad, and we get stuck in second-class accommodations five or six blocks down the street. I don't even have a holoset in my room."

39 Mantikhoras, who had overheard these gibes from a balcony, revealed herself to the mutterers and said, "Don't begrudge me the temporal comfort of a bridal suite. I'm not with you for long, and the rooms I go to prepare for you when I depart, why, not even the fabled Conrad Hilton himself could duplicate for plushness."

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40 And suffering from no uncommon homesickness, she retired from them, leaving them abashed and penitent.

CHAPTER 6

A wedding in Escambia County.

1 Not long after this, in Pensacola, Florida, M.U.N.A., Gamaliel asked Rachelka to marry him; and she consented on the condition, easily and promptly met, that Mantikhoras herself preside over their exchange of vows.

2 Because even the mantid appeared in some haste to bestow legitimacy on the astrogator's ardor, the couple decided to forgo a full-blown ceremony with ushers, bridesmaids, flower girls, and the obligatory three-tiered cake, almost inevitably stale.

3 They would marry that same evening, and the following morning Mantikhoras would announce the event as a *fait accompli*, preferably at a breakfast gathering of the disciples there in the restaurant of the Gulf Sands Budget Resort.

4 Tooling along in a rented dune buggy, then, Gamaliel and his passengers kept their eyes open for a roadside synagogue, of which there seemed to be, in this elongate coastal neighborhood, a dismaying dearth.

5 Satisfied that the couple would not soon find what they were seeking, Mantikhoras told the astrogator to turn right and drive inland until they arrived at any cleanly structure dedicated to both the remembrance and the service of The One.

6 This proved to be a modern Neutester chapel of reinforced cinder blocks and polarized glass tinted a shade off full purple. Fenced about by palm trees, it sat in the shadow of a multistory condominium whose topmost floors loomed in the dusk like a shelf of stormclouds illumined from within by pale lightnings.

7 Declared Gamaliel at the sight of the chapel, "This won't do," but Rachelka put a gentle finger to his lips; and Mantikhoras said, "If we were in Cairo, it would be a mosque; if in Tokyo, a shrine; if on Acrux V, a verdant meadow with neither pillars nor canopy. We're going inside."

8 The chapel door was unlocked; and the dusk of the interior was deeper than that of the falling night, and on the wall behind the altar a pathetic effigy of the Crucified hung like a lynched horse thief in an old movie.

9 Rachelka murmured, "It's always seemed to me that the sight of a human God nailed helplessly to a cross would steal away the faith of the faint-hearted"; but she approached the altar with

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Gamaliel, and Mantikhoras married them before The One by taking them together in her clasp and praying wordlessly.

The transfiguration.

10 When this was done, the Alphacrucian released the newlyweds and climbed the cinder blocks behind the altar like a fly going up a wall, stopping at last beside the figure of the Crucified.

11 Here Mantikhoras sidled atop the body of the plaster Christ; and suddenly that entire end of the Neutester chapel shone as brightly as the flash of a fusion bomb, and the organ in the choir loft began to rumble in the bass registers, faultlessly mimicking human speech:

12 "This is another of my beloved issue," intoned the organ, "in whom I renew my covenant with the lost, and the sick at heart, and the broken in body; and I send her in the guise of the Female to straighten what has been made crooked and in the flesh of the Alien to prepare the worlds for a wider love."

13 The light above the altar abated a little; and when Rachelka and Gamaliel next looked, the effigy of Jesus Messiah stirred to life and came down from its oaken crucifix to congratulate the newlyweds; but Mantikhoras was nowhere to be seen, and this greatly alarmed the human couple.

14 Rachelka retreated from the vivified effigy, saying, "Please tell us where our Mistress has gone; we didn't come in here to disturb you." And Gamaliel was no braver than his bride, backpedaling just as fast and gaping in horror and disbelief at the blood oozing from the wound in the effigy's side.

15 And the plaster Christ, in the womanly voice of Mantikhoras, said, "I'm with you yet, and this The One does to seal my authority and to exchange among the three of us the vows that marry us all. See, I'm simultaneously man, and mantid, and universal rational soul, and abiding compassion of God."

16 To which Rachelka replied, "And you're bleeding all over the carpet, too": so that even Mantikhoras, turning aside to take a chalice from the altar cloth, chuckled at her tone.

17 And then the living effigy said, "Wine for the wedding feast," holding the chalice beneath her punctured side and filling the vessel with a most excellent vintage.

18 A moment later the flow had stopped, and the three of them were convivially toasting one another and partaking of a spontaneous sacrament that was also a simple human celebration.

19 Squinting over the rim of the cup at the transfigured mantid, the astrogator ventured the opinion that things would go more easily for them all if Mantikhoras retained this poignant human

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shape, trimmed her beard and tresses, and put on contemporary clothing, particularly if her ability to do wonders remained unimpaired by the change.

20 Rachelka said, "If you did wish to keep this body, Mistress, I'd be glad to style your hair and buy you a serviceable wardrobe."

21 "I'm surprised and disappointed," Mantikhoras replied, "to find that you tempt me to the impossible, for *this* is for you alone. I came as I came to widen rather than to delimit the circle of love.

22 "Sanctity for life the Hindus teach, sometimes refraining even from slapping an insect that has stung them; and although I honor that teaching, too, my concern is for rational souls, whatever their shape or element. All such, you see, must have the opportunity either to affirm or to deny their kinship *with* The One and *in* The One.

23 "Therefore I return this plaster body to its place, and those who can resurrect it in their hearts are welcome to do so, and those who cannot are welcome to seek another way, in spirit and in truth."

24 These words spoken, the church filled again with an annihilating brightness, which briefly put out the sight of the newlyweds; when they could see again, they beheld Mantikhoras before them in her Alphacrucian body and the unmoving effigy of Christ back on its cross.

The newlyweds sworn to silence.

25 Said the mantid, "I charge you never to reveal what tonight you have witnessed; not, that is, until I have been taken from you": a charge that filled the couple with a painful forboding.

26 "How will that happen?" Gamaliel asked, and Mantikhoras replied, "Don't fret about it, my astrogator. All I can tell you tonight is that you have exchanged your wedding vows in one of the few Neutester chapels east of the Mississippi, and that my death will be on the hands of those who worship under Neutester auspices and guidance."

27 And thinking *Thaddeus Thorogood* and *Joe Bob Newcombe*, Gamaliel shuddered and wondered aloud if Mantikhoras would come back to them after a certain time to grant them the right to testify to her wondrous transfiguration.

28 To their surprise the Daughter of Mantid laughed and said, "In a sense I've already come back, haven't I?" But noticing their confusion, she added, "I may not, Gamaliel, and at this late date my failure to rise again shouldn't dishearten you. You well know already what must be done."

29 And she led them out to the dune buggy so that they could

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return it to the Gulf Sands Budget Resort before incurring any additional rental fee.

CHAPTER 7

Mantikhoras and the cetaceans.

1 And after this, in Miami, the Alphacrucian and her followers visited Marine Merrymakers Amusement Park, a playland set amid the desolation of the rubble-strewn city; and in a small painted rowboat Mantikhoras went out upon the salt waters of the main pool with Gamaliel, Damaris Brown and Nicholas Morowitz, there to commune with the porpoises and a rambunctious trio of killer whales.

2 When the snouts of these smiling, warm-blooded fish rose beside the boat, Lady Mantid spoke to the creatures in their own languages, squeaking in tones that her human disciples found alternately musical and shrilly ear-splitting.

3 Unable to follow this medley of eloquent cetacean homilies, Gamaliel asked, "Mistress, what're you saying to them?" Meanwhile, the porpoises and whales cavorted around them like great sea-going puppies.

4 And Mantikhoras replied, "The same things I say to you and yours, Gamaliel, for they have rational souls akin to your own, and they understand in their innocence what you, in your worldly sophistication, must often remember with both pain and struggle."

5 This was a hard saying, and Nicholas Morowitz took exception, declaring, "Their innocence isn't all that wonderful, is it? I mean, they'd be as prone to error and sin as any of us if they had hands, wouldn't they?"

6 To which the Daughter of Mantid replied, "Blessed are they who have neither hands nor feet, for they can't employ them to do evil. But doubly blessed are they who have both hands and feet and yet *refrain* from doing evil."

7 This statement led Nicholas to conclude that in the eyes of The One human beings were superior to cetaceans, but Mantikhoras rebuked Nicholas for this error with a further saying: "Those who have hands likewise have an obligation, but only a few of the handed have chosen to pick it up."

8 From a pail of white fish and flounder segments in the prow of the little boat Damaris fed the skylarking porpoises and whales, astonished that even though she had been tossing fish to them for quite a long time the pail was not yet empty.

9 At last the manager of the Marine Merrymakers Amusement

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Park showed up at poolside and protested that the mantid's colloquy with the animals had gone on too long, and that feeding them so many fish would queer them for the next public performance.

10 When Mantikhoras replied, "But I've *come* to feed them," the manager cursed and beckoned to an underling to approach the pool's edge in an ancient fire truck with a turret-mounted water cannon. This the employee did, and soon the water cannon was shooting powerful jets of salt water at the little boat.

11 Gamaliel and Nicholas were pummeled overboard; porpoises rescued them and deposited them, drenched but otherwise unharmed, on the far bank of the pool, from whence they watched the unexpected conclusion to the battle.

12 Protecting Damaris with her body, Mantikhoras withstood a noisy stream of water ricocheting from her prothorax like a ruffle of living lace. Then, lifting one forelimb, she deflected this spray back at the fire truck, which immediately capsized onto its side like an enormous seashell and spun away across the damp concrete.

13 The manager and his unhurt minion retreated; and without any further hindrance Mantikhoras communed with the cetaceans until Venus was up in the west and a balmy evening breeze had begun to freshen from the Carolinas.

Setting free the primates.

14 Not long after this, in Atlanta, Rachelka accompanied Mantikhoras to the zoological gardens, where some few people supposed the mantid an extraterrestrial specimen imported for the purposes of display.

15 But these people were in the minority, for the Alphacrucian's formidable reputation had preceded her; and her growing fame incited everywhere the envy, suspicion, and hatred of mean-spirited persons in the various ruling councils of the Multipartite Union.

16 Of late, in fact, Mantikhoras had talked often with her followers about both the imminence of her departure from them and the course they must plot and cleave to once she was gone.

17 Neither Rachelka nor Gamaliel nor any of the others cared for this kind of talk, and Rachelka in particular was glad to be walking with Mantikhoras along the paths of the Grant Park Zoo.

18 At last they came to the monkeyhouse, where many of the primates from a local research institution resided now that their usefulness as experimental subjects had come to an end; and Mantikhoras insisted on going inside.

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19 The dim interior of the building stank, and in cages apart from those of the spider monkeys and capuchins sat or swung the apes from the research center: gorillas, chimpanzees, gibbons, and orangutans. They peopled this darkness as prison inmates people the anonymous tiers of a correctional facility, and Rachelka could feel their resentful, melancholy eyes boring into her.

20 "What are we doing here?" she asked the Daughter of Mantid. "Are you taking your ministry not only to the articulate cetaceans, but also to these mute and shaggy beasts?"

21 And Mantikhoras replied, "A soul may be rational even if it doesn't have the capacity to speak in tongues. The capacity of these guiltless prisoners is to speak with their hands and eyes, a speech to which they bring a rhetorical skill surpassing that of even the cleverest of former holocasters."

22 "Touché," said Rachelka, blushing, and continued deeper into the monkeyhouse with the mantid, the two of them providing a conspicuous focus for the hostility and frustrations of the great apes, who at last began to pelt them with fruit rinds and feces.

23 Cried Rachelka, "Come, Mistress, let's get out of here!" But Mantikhoras paid her no heed, preferring to let each outraged simian screech at and bombard them as they passed along the row, ostensibly helpless against the onslaught.

24 Between her teeth Rachelka whispered, "You deflected the stream of water from the fire truck at Marine Merrymakers Amusement Park. Why the devil can't you protect us from these disgusting missiles?"

25 "You may first blunt the enmity of the wronged," Mantikhoras said, "by letting them express it. Afterwards, however, you can't root out what remains of this hatred without righting the wrong that created and sustained it."

26 Rachelka started to say, "How are we going to do that?" but the mantid turned and led her back down the row of cages, pausing at each one to open its door and to encourage its puzzled occupants to come out. Soon, many of the liberated apes were knuckle-walking along behind their crap-bedizened emancipators.

27 Outside the monkeyhouse Mantikhoras bade the former inmates go in peace or else cast their lot with her human disciples: a choice that to Rachelka's way of thinking seemed hardly a choice at all, especially since liberty in the fallen human world might soon bring the apes to renewed confinement or maybe even death.

28 She said as much to her Mistress, who reminded her that the apes were also free to return to their cages, and that many of them would undoubtedly do so. And Mantikhoras added, "Those

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who stay with us will have demonstrated by that action the spiritual rationality that redeemed them. It's a kind of test."

29 It therefore came to pass on the travels of the Alphacrucians about the continent that Andrew Stout acquired an orangutan for a roommate, and Priscilla Muthinga a sweet adolescent gibbon, and that reserving motel accommodations became from thenceforward a major hassle and an ever-mounting expense.

CHAPTER 8

Erotic spirituality.

1 By nights on their beds in a dozen different cities or playlands Gamaliel and Rachelka sought each the other's soul, speaking in the gardens of this nightly ceremony with both their bodies and their mouths.

2 The sanctuaries in which they recited their liturgies of love were perfumed (it seemed) with Lebanese colognes and Lysol, with cinnamon-scented hand lotions and various industrial-strength floor waxes, with instant coffee and commercial bug spray.

3 Meanwhile, the fluorescents in the bathroom blinked on and off with every unpredictable power surge; and some of these power surges were in the astrogator's blood, and the blinking of the fluorescents illumined him within.

4 As for Rachelka's eyes, they were like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim, more limpid by far than the pools in the Marine Merrymakers Amusement Park in Miami, albeit as festively asplash with a salt-water ardor.

5 Night after night in the inns of their holy itinerancy, his left hand was under her head, and his right hand embraced her; and when the dews in his head were spent, and his hand drawn back from the hole in the door, and the mountains of spices thoroughly plundered, Gamaliel and Rachelka would chatter like school kids.

The newlyweds converse.

6 *Gamaliel:* Have I ever told you how happy I am that I'm not rooming, like Andrew, with an orangutan?

7 *Rachelka:* Or I you that I'm not the suitemate of a gibbon? Bless Priscilla's heart. She's bearing up well, but these latest influxes of converts—cetaceans, simians, pets with genetically augmented minds—well, they just aren't doing us any good at the grass-roots level.

8 *Gamaliel:* From the beginning the fundamentalists murmured that Mantikhoras was the Antichrist, but now the murmurings grow stronger, and even some fairly liberal theologians in the

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more moderate Protestant denominations have taken it up. That's scary.

9 *Rachelka:* Ah, yes, the ones who congratulate themselves on having the temerity to admit primates to the evolutionary family tree of *Homo sapiens*, but who balk at the prospect of sitting down to tea with them. Well, I'm afraid I sympathize. I balk, too.

10 *Gamaliel:* But, Rachelka, Muggeridge has impeccable manners for a chimp, and Edward's the sweetest little gibbon you could ever hope to meet; and Bonzo, why, Bonzo, the little scamp, he's—

11 *Rachelka:* He's the one who utterly ruined that original Guy de Froissart jumpsuit I wore into the Grant Park monkeyhouse back in Atlanta, and it's a real bitch trying to forgive the little bugger.

12 *Gamaliel:* Well, for Mantikhoras's sake, you've got to *try*. She keeps saying that her time among us grows shorter, and if that's so, my lovely Shulamite, we're going to have to strive particularly hard to keep her commandments to us.

13 *Rachelka:* I swear, Gamaliel, I sometimes think she's deliberately hastening her passion. This mandated fraternizing with nonhuman life forms seems designed to lose friends and alienate fundamentalists, no matter how bright and perky the converts themselves are.

14 *Gamaliel:* It's a necessary part of her ministry. How can we hope to establish meaningful relationships with alien intelligences in other star systems if we can't reach some kind of humane accord with the more rational species here on our own planet?

15 *Rachelka:* Kiss a porpoise for Christ, huh? Well, the absurdity of that, my would-be Worldly Wiseman, is that even four generations after the Cobalt Galas you can find coreligionists sniping at one another, and agnostics at agnostics, and atheists at atheists, and devout dialectical materialists at anyone in a pair of well-soled shoes.

Erotic spirituality.

16 And the astrogator said, "Mantikhoras never promised us . . . uh, what do you think you're doing? . . never promised us a rose garden . . . even if the joints of your thighs are like jewels . . . and, uh, the bud of your navel like the whorl of a rose."

17 "Be quiet, man," Rachelka told him. "In a few days we'll be off to proselytize those who would either convert or kill us, and I'm no traitor to the faith. For tonight, then, make haste, my beloved, and be like a hart on a hill of fragrant spices."

18 Which Gamaliel most eagerly did; and from deep in the bow-

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els of the inn the astrogator and his Shulamite heard, but did not truly hear, the steady *thump thump thump* of the bass notes reverberating from the jukebox in the motel's bar.

19 Meanwhile, cockroaches scuttled in the dark, and in an upstairs room the Daughter of Mantid contemplated her fate.

CHAPTER 9

The Neutesters.

1 Now on the Great Plains of North America, centered in eastern Colorado but ranging northward into Canada and southward into Texas and parts of Old Mexico, there dwelt several thriving enclaves of Christian sectarians known in the aggregate as Neutesters, a neologism for New Testament Revivalists.

2 Their leader was the right Reverend Thaddeus Thorogood, D.D.; their headquarters was not far from Lamar, Colorado; and their most distinctive dwelling places were the abandoned networks of underground tunnels designed and constructed years and years ago, for shuttling warhead-bearing missiles back and forth beneath the plains.

3 Three months into the Earthly mission of Mantikhoras, Thorogood relayed word to every Neutester stronghold from Four Buttes, Montana, to Brownsville, Texas, and beyond, that the Alphacrucian was most certainly the Antichrist; and of late Joe Bob Newcombe, his best-known lieutenant, had been pounding home this same message as Rachelka Dan's replacement on the holovision program, *Parsecs Ahead.*

4 Anyone giving aid and comfort to the Daughter of Mantid's deluded followers, both men proclaimed, would either forfeit resurrection altogether or else enjoy its most poignant perquisites in Hell.

5 Thorogood quoted at length from the Olivet Discourse in *The Gospel of Mark*: " 'For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect' "; but as many Neutesters as denounced the mantid, just that many or more hurried to embrace her.

6 When Mantikhoras began to travel not only with Roman Catholics, Jews, and Unitarians, but also with primates, porpoises, and talking dogs, the tide of Neutester defections to the ranks of the Alphacrucians abated rather noticeably.

7 Remarking this, Thorogood mounted a powerful counterattack, via the CABLE-STAR holocast of *Parsecs Ahead*, stressing the implied New Testament doctrines of "man's essential uniqueness" and "the permanent significance of human nature."

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8 As the House of Representatives of the Multipartite Union now had only fifty-four members continentwide, and as the Senate had been in permanent adjournment ever since decamping to Cleveland, Ohio, and as most of the members of both the executive branch and the quasi-Supreme Court were still in prison in Vladivostok, U.S.S.R.;

9 Thaddeus Thorogood and his Neutester lieutenants composed the nearest thing to a stable temporal authority (excepting perhaps the Union of Amusement Park Managers, the Pan-Solar Press Guild, and the Interstellar Diplomatic Instrument for Outreach, Trade, and Study) still extant in North America.

10 Therefore, when Thorogood sent out a decree to Gamaliel Crucis, the astrogator, demanding that his Alphacrucian Mistress make a pilgrimage to Thorogood's underground holdings outside Lamar, so that the right Reverend could interview Mantikhoras about her activities,

11 Gamaliel feared a trap, and told his Mistress so, and urged her to avoid at all costs going docilely into a Neutester stronghold *anywhere* in the country and most especially that of Thaddeus Thorogood himself.

12 Indeed, even Rachelka, who had recently learned that she was with child, sought to dissuade Mantikhoras from answering the right Reverend's arrogant summons, saying, "That bastard sincerely believes you're the great antagonist: he's gunning for you in the name of God."

13 But Mantikhoras said, "A sincere belief is never overcome without a struggle, and if I flee from or sidestep this man, I'll merely confirm him in the notion that I'm an imposter."

14 Rachelka expostulated with the mantid: "Must *everyone* come to see you for Who you really are? Why can't you let this priggish villain go? His piety is a disguise for his own self- worship."

15 To which Mantikhoras replied, "And that's the ultimate blasphemy, even for those who believe in Wordless Happenstance. I'd be remiss not to tell him so. His name is an allegory whose informing irony every thinking creature must one day acknowledge."

16 "Feh," said Gamaliel, for he believed this exegesis needlessly explicit; but the Daughter of Mantid was determined not to let anyone slip through her clutches as a consequence of murky doctrine or abstruse pedagogy, and she waved her antennae almost gaily at the astrogator.

Sister Salvation & so forth.

17 The Alphacrucian set off from Richmond, Virginia, for La-

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mar, Colorado, in a caravan of methane-powered buses and a couple of water-filled tank trucks for the cetaceans: a rattletrap assemblage of vehicles of every color from lemon-lime to magenta.
18 One Pan-Solar Press representative dubbed the mantid and her entourage "Sister Salvation & The Technicolor Pipedream Traveling Zoo & Medicine Show," a name that stuck because Gamaliel and the others picked it up and began to use it among themselves.
19 In St. Joseph, Missouri, once a jumping-off place for the Oregon Trail, an importunate holocaster asked the mantid why she and her disciples were traveling in such a gaudy caravan to see the authoritarian leader of the Neutesters.
20 And Mantikhoras replied, "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, then Mohammed will go to the mountain"; and this off-hand recitation of a hallowed cliché was interpreted by the news analysts as everything from a cryptic earthquake prediction to an oblique self-denial of the alien's own divine mandate.
21 The journey itself was an obstreperous, inchmeal affair, during which Mantikhoras performed several semimiraculous cures, and talked the caravan's way past a half-dozen illegal roadblocks, and faced down any number of adolescent hecklers (whatever their chronological age) with soft words and sincere good humor;
22 And at last the buses and tank trucks achieved their destination; and the mantid and all her retinue, minus the porpoises and killer whales, disembarked to the amplified strains of an old cowboy ditty called "Home on the Range."

An audience underground.

23 It was snowing outside Lamar, but in the immense subterranean prairie-dog village of the Neutesters the temperature was balmy, downright springlike; and Mantikhoras, along with Gamaliel, Rachelka, Andrew, and Priscilla, rode a pump-powered handcar to their audience with Thaddeus Thorogood.

24 A tall, cadaverous man whose receding hairline and dun-colored age spots gave his head the look of a freshly unearthed skull, Thorogood greeted the Alphacrucians with some warmth and effusiveness, welcoming them to his carpeted lair at the heart of the complex.

25 Rachelka noted that to counter his facial resemblance to a death's-head, Thorogood rouged his lips and kept his sapphire-blue eyes constantly in motion, as if by darting their glances here and there he would prevent his being mistaken for a corpse.
26 After certain preliminaries (Mantikhoras declined a bowl of

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tea), the chief Neutester asked, "Why have you confined your ministry to the continental Multipartite Union when there are sinners abroad, out among the colonies of our Solar System, and undoubtedly on your home planet, too?"

27 "Undoubtedly," Mantikhoras replied. "The answer to your question, however, is that this is where I'm most needed. Here you have amusement parks, sports stadia, and radiation-treatment centers; gambling casinos, massage parlors, and mutant reservations; monkeyhouses, Holiday Inns, and brothels; military bases, drag—"

28 *Thorogood (interrupting):* You've made your point, Lady Mantid. But I think you've neglected to mention the fact that media coverage isn't bad in this part of the world. I'm sure that was a consideration, too, wasn't it?

29 *Mantikhoras:* I was taken against my will from Acrux V, Your Right Reverendship. What I've done here in your contaminated homeland, I've done in the name of The One who permitted my kidnapping for purposes that reveal themselves in my ministry.

30 *Thorogood:* "For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Mark 13:6. But you don't deceive the people of the New Testament Revival, Lady Mantid, or at least not their democratically ordained shepherd, Thaddeus Thorogood, D.D.

31 *Mantikhoras:* A verse or two later, you should note, Jesus is quoted to the effect that nation shall rise against nation, and that earthquakes and famines shall occur, and that such signs shall signal "the beginnings of sorrows."

32 *Thorogood:* Excellent. You're not unfamiliar with The Book. But even Satan can quote Scripture, Lady Mantid, and what you've just quoted has come to pass in these very days of tribulation. As the poet wrote, "Surely the Second Coming is at hand."

The debate grows heated.

33 Under her breath Rachelka murmured, " 'What rough beast . . . slouches toward Bethlehem' "; and the chief Neutester, overhearing her, turned his head and smiled condescendingly.

34 *Thorogood:* If you'll forgive the observation, my good woman, your Mistress certainly qualifies as a "rough beast." And although Yeats was a visionary heretic, I almost believe that your Lady Mantid has arrived on earth as a portent of the *true* Second Coming.

35 *Mantikhoras:* Forgive me, Your Right Reverendship, but the passage from Mark suggests that you and your people, without

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yet witnessing the Messiah's return, have lived *through* the epoch of sorrows. The Cobalt Galas are long over, the Great California Earthquake has already taken place, and humanity lives on.

36 *Thorogood:* What are you driving at? That we've outlived the conditions that should have foretokened the Second Coming?

37 *Mantikhoras:* Exactly. Things are bad today, I'll grant you, but they're *usually* bad, in one way or another; and the wars and rumors of war alluded to in the Olivet Discourse are things of the past. Albeit in aimless remnants here and there about the globe, the peoples of Earth are finally at peace.

38 *Gamaliel (unable to hold* his *peace):* That's partly because they're too sick and exhausted to wage war. [But both Mantikhoras and the chief Neutester ignored him.]

39 *Thorogood:* Let me get this straight. We've outlived the time of trials; therefore you *can't* be the Antichrist, because the Antichrist should already have come. By the same token, you can't be Christ himself because the Antichrist has not preceded you. Is that the gist of your argument?

40 *Mantikhoras:* Only to the extent that I decline to be identified with your problematic Antichrist. On the other hand, your second deduction is faulty.

41 The significance of this last remark sank into Thorogood's understanding only slowly; but when he finally encompassed it, his lips drew in so that prim little crow's-feet bracketed them at the corners.

42 *Thorogood:* Who do you say you are?

43 *Mantikhoras:* Although I've undeniably come again, this is not *the* Second Coming. By the grace of The One, whose compassion and mercy are limitless, it's merely an extension—an addendum, if you like—to my first metahistoric visit. I'm renewing in this dramatic fashion, Your Right Reverendship, what you and your followers *claim* to revive, in spirit and in truth.

44 *Thorogood:* The impudence of your self-aggrandizement is almost as reprehensible as its insupportable sacrilege! It's bad theology and even worse manners! Jesus would've never said *anything* like that, and it condemns you, condemns you utterly!

45 *Gamaliel (interrupting):* How do you account for the cures she's effected, the miracles she's performed, the converts she's made, and the love among both kindred and strangers she's striven to inspire?

46 *Thorogood:* Easily! Telepathic suggestion, telekinetic trickery, deceitful promises, and the satanic perpetration of an undis-

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criminating mass hysteria! People do it all the time! Why, *I've* been known to do it!

47 *Mantikhoras:* Then I don't understand what—

48 *Thorogood:* You've had media assistance all along. The presence of Rachelka Dan in your entourage is telling. It wouldn't be so intolerable if you didn't try to pass yourself off as a new incarnation—a ridiculous *orthopterization*, so to speak—of the Living Christ!

The audience ends.

49 And the right Reverend Thaddeus Thorogood stormed from the concrete chamber, leaving his own lieutenants within disconcerting glaring range of those of the Alphacrucian mantid, whose forelimbs immediately assumed an attitude of prayerful contemplation.

50 Gamaliel's heart misgave him, however, for they were at the mercy of the outraged Neutesters, and he had just heard Mantikhoras say, "I don't understand," a phrase he had never heard on her lips before.

51 Said one of Thorogood's jackbooted warders, brandishing an ugly-looking weapon called a lanceflame, "Too bad you didn't bring one of them snot-slick, fat-headed fish down here with you. I could fry it on the spot, and your six-legged Jesus'd've something to eat when she comes back from the dead."

52 Laughing, the warders shepherded Mantikhoras and her disciples, under guard, back into the tunnel to the handcar on which they had earlier arrived at Thorogood's private silo. Gamaliel understood that they were prisoners and would not soon be returning to the surface.

CHAPTER 10

And what of Judas?

1 And that night Mantikhoras resided with Gamaliel, Rachelka, Andrew, and Priscilla in an underground apartment belonging to their enemies, who had not allowed them to return to The Technicolor Eipedream Traveling Zoo & Medicine Show, the members of which awaited them at a commercial camping ground outside Lamar.

2 The walls of their prison sweated a rust-colored condensation; and knowing this for a sign, none of those imprisoned with the mantid could sleep.

3 Furthermore, at various places about the chamber Gamaliel found small bowls containing the crisped bodies of locusts, which

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the Neutesters had supplied them as a scornful supper before their Mistress's passion, whenever that might be.

4 Neither the astrogator nor any of the others wished to partake of this meal, but Mantikhoras bade them eat what they could of the offering and sponge from the walls enough of the ferruginous condensation to slake their powerful thirsts, for they had had no food or water since early that morning.

5 The disciples expected their Mistress to relent at any moment and to eat with them, or else to explain for them the ritual significance of the meal supplied them by the Neutesters; but she prayed in troubled silence over the repast and declined to take anything for herself.

6 Surprisingly, the crisped locusts had a pleasant taste and the moisture from the walls was equally palatable; and an angry guilt stole upon Gamaliel because Mantikhoras continued to keep both her silence and her fast.

7 At last in helpless anxiety and impatience he threw his bowl against the wall, crying, "It's easy to see what's happening here, Mistress! Which of us will betray you further? Which of us have you selected to be your Judas? Is it me, Lady Mantid? If so, tell me tonight, this very moment! I'll kill myself now instead of later!"

8 Rachelka attempted to comfort her husband, but Andrew and Priscilla also began to petition the mantid, demanding to know if she had singled one of them out for the role of Iscariot and pleading exemption from that shame on the grounds of their great love for, and service to, her cause.

9 Somewhat sadly Mantikhoras said, "This clamor doesn't become you, friends. If there were to be a Judas this time, it wouldn't be as a consequence of *my* selection that you—or you—or you—fulfilled that role. It would follow instead the purblind or evil dictates of your own heretofore loyal hearts."

10 The astrogator cursed this answer, and banged on the sweating walls, and raged that if there *were* to be a Judas this time, one of them would inevitably fall into the role, and he for one didn't like the odds: the original Twelve had been far better off.

11 Mantikhoras said, "Be quiet, Gamaliel, and restrain both your fear and your anger. Haven't you noticed that on this occasion I took pains *to betray myself?* In mortal eyes even The One may err; and although I don't subscribe to that parochial notion, I *do* understand its ineradicable popularity among you."

12 And she continued, saying, "My self-betrayal, then, is a concession to your ignorance and a mercy to those close enough to me to fall into the *potential* danger that torments all four of

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you tonight. If I'm only a reminder, a latter-day renewal of the covenant forged in Caesar's time, then I may gladly forgo the drama inherent in the traitorous act of Iscariot."

12 Rachelka said, "Lady Mantid, although you've mercifully spared us a Judas, you still haven't abstracted villains from your Story. The Neutesters seem to be surrogates for your powerful Pharisaical adversaries in the Original Version, and I'm afraid they're also going to stand in for your Roman executioners."

13 "It's almost impossible to abstract villainy from this Story," the mantid replied, "because it's impossible to abstract villainy from the self-aware condition. Furthermore, no segment of a self-aware population has a corner on, or an immunity from, it."

14 Priscilla ventured, "And so this time you've purposely chosen the Neutesters to demonstrate that fact?"

15 And Mantikhoras answered, "They've chosen themselves. That they assume the role in the mistaken belief that I'm the Antichrist explains their grandiose self-corruption but in no wise mitigates it."

16 Andrew put an end to this metaphysical discussion by declaring that almost certainly the members of The Technicolor Pipedream & Etc. would storm their underground Bastille and liberate them, as Mantikhoras herself had freed the great apes from the monkeyhouse in Atlanta.

17 But the Alphacrucian said, "I assembled you for discipleship, not guerrilla warfare. You're proposing a pipedream of your own, but at least it recommends to me the strength and indomitability of your hope." Hearing these words, Andrew retired to a corner and wept.

The disciples poisoned.

18 An hour or so later all four of the Alphacrucian's human followers fell deathly ill, and the mantid understood that one of Thorogood's henchmen had poisoned the food left in the room for them. To discover that she had inadvertently allowed those whom she loved to act for her in the capacity of hireling foodtasters enraged Mantikhoras.

19 Quickly, then, she cast the maleficent chemicals out of her disciples' bloodstreams, beginning with the astrogator's wife in order to reverse at once any of the harm that had been wrought against not only the woman herself but also the nascent soul in her womb, and concluding with Gamaliel.

20 The astrogator said, "This is the Neutesters' 'humane' substitute for crucifixion, Mistress. Apparently it never crossed their minds that taking five other lives [for Gamaliel counted the un-

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born child] might strike anyone as a small blot on the humanity of their methods."

21 And because the rage of Mantikhoras was kindled against Thorogood and the Neutesters, she took every empty bowl in the room and shattered it on the walls as the astrogator had earlier done with his own.

22 "Mistress, didn't you have any idea what they'd done to the food?" Priscilla asked. "It seems to me that—"

23 But Rachelka interrupted, saying, "Mantikhoras isn't *completely* coincident with The One, Priscilla. Her knowledge is finite, like our own, even if her wisdom far exceeds that of imperfect mortals."

24 But even Gamaliel, now that the danger had passed, was outraged that his wife and unborn child had been placed in such jeopardy; and he wondered aloud why the wisdom of the Alphacrucian had not enabled her to deduce the likelihood of their food's having been tampered with.

25 Mantikhoras rounded on the man whom she had just saved: "Had the Neutesters presented you with bowls of *tempting* meats or succulents, my suspicions would have awakened instantly; but because they gave you insects, items you would ordinarily disdain, I was lulled to the danger.

26 "Now, however, I expect from our captors only the worst, and it's my plan to make it exceedingly difficult for them to carry out the deed that their ignorance and prideful piety compel them to do.

27 "As for you, Gamaliel, the words you've just uttered constitute a small betrayal that serves to legitimize my passion. Fortunately it's a betrayal of the vain and venial, rather than the mortal, kind; and I forgive it."

28 Hearing this, the astrogator hung his head, and shut his eyes, and eased himself to his knees before his Mistress.

The disciples admonished to survive.

29 Mantikhoras found a speaker switch near the door, threw it, and in a musical but commanding voice informed Thorogood (wherever he was) that he must immediately release her followers if he hoped to be successful in physically eliminating her mantid presence from the face of the Earth.

30 Gamaliel and the others bewailed this announcement, saying that they wished to remain with her to the end, and arguing that to coerce Thorogood to free them would be no kindness but a bereaving cruelty.

31 But Lady Mantid said, "It's necessary for you to survive this,

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friends, and that you go out from this continent to other continents, and from this planet to other planets, and from this solar system to other solar systems, and even from this galaxy to other galaxies, to proclaim the gospel to every creature with brains enough to comprehend it."

32 Because the astrogator continued to beg the mantid's permission to accompany her to the place of her ultimate passion (as a means of atoning for his lapses of both faith and gratitude), Mantikhoras granted him this boon with the stipulation that upon seeing the ordeal through he return immediately to Rachelka and the others.

More treachery.

33 Whereupon Thaddeus Thorogood's disembodied voice spoke to them, saying, "Woe to gravid serpents, and to every snake that slithers in the Great Serpent's wake, for they shall die in the pit with the Viper that seduced them!"

34 Before Gamaliel could square this herpetological metaphor with his Mistress's insectile form, the door to the chamber burst open; and in rushed a contingent of Neutester warders in uniforms embroidered at the breast pocket with the ancient Christian insignia, and each one of them was dutifully firing a lanceflame.

35 Screaming, Mantikhoras's disciples sought to take cover by throwing themselves on the floor, while the Alphacrucian herself, recognizing the need for a more decisive measure, waved one segmented forelimb and halted time within the cramped dimensions of the chamber.

36 As in holographic tableau, every member of the attack force was frozen in place, and in the air before them hung harmless streaks of varicolored light and interwoven parabolas delineating the paths of either bullets or birdshot (for some of them carried weapons a good deal older than lanceflames).

37 And then the mantid lifted the spell from her disciples and told them to creep past the frozen warders into the tunnel outside the chamber. She went with them, located another speaker switch in the corridor, and, activating it, told Thorogood, "If you want my life, Your Right Reverendship, you're going to have to let my people go before I agree to cooperate in its sacrifice."

38 But the chief Neutester responded by releasing a cyanide gas into the corridor, and sending electrical currents running along the floor, and directing at them through the overhead sprinkler system a lethal rain of hydrochloric acid.

39 Each of these attacks the Alphacrucian thwarted by speaking a word or raising a forelimb; and at last Thaddeus Thorogood

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himself appeared at the end of the damp, burnt-smelling corridor and came walking toward them like an upright corpse.

40 Angrily he said, "You've hypnotized my warders and monkeyed with the death-dealing systems on which we've based our internal security. Because you've stymied me to this point, Sister Salvation, I'll cut a deal with you.

41 "No more tricks, you understand? Only a ready surrender to the fate you deserve. If you agree to that, I'll let all but Gamaliel the Astrogator return to the disgusting pandemonium of your Technicolor Pipedream Whatchamacallit."

42 Said Mantikhoras with alacrity, "Done!"

CHAPTER 11

Thorogood tries again, and again, and again.

1 But even after Rachelka, Andrew, and Priscilla had found safety aboveground, the Alphacrucian continued to resist the Neutesters' efforts to kill her; and Thorogood in mounting hatred and frustration accused her of reneging on a promise.

2 Mantikhoras countered that she wished to die in the sunlight, not in the bowels of a human ant-farm; but privately she told Gamaliel that she was giving Thorogood and his minions every opportunity to refrain from the heinous act that would condemn and stigmatize them forever.

3 To that end, she purposely did not succumb to two more attempts to shoot her, one more to poison her, and a series of somewhat more exotic assaults, including bludgeoning, burning, decapitation, drowning, electrocution, garroting, hanging, induced cardiac infarction, overfeeding, smothering, starvation, telemetrically triggered organ failure, and vivisection to the point of no return.

4 Gamaliel was also at risk during this time, but because Mantikhoras wrapped him in her protective cloak, in the end he was merely a horrified witness to these inept enormities: failures that did not convert or discourage Thorogood but instead stimulated in him an even more fanatical desire to obliterate the mantid.

The journey.

5 At last the Neutesters put Mantikhoras and Gamaliel into a railroad car with barred windows; and for three days the underground train of which it was a part traveled northwestward beneath the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains toward the Sarcee Indian Reserve in Alberta, Canada, M.U.N.A.

6 Gamaliel was often delirious during this trip, for the blackness of the tunnel walls hurtling past triggered in him memories of

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the undifferentiated corridors of the interstellar substratum; and he dreamed that he was practicing his occupation as an astrogator aboard a vessel completely unresponsive to his skills.

7 "We'll climb out of this," he murmured in his delirium, "as soon as I can get a transdimensional fix on the stars. Why can't I find the stars? Why can't I find the goddamn stars?" And Mantikhoras would ease his distress by whispering into his hallucinations words of encouragement and solace.

8 Denver, Casper, Billings, and Great Falls (each with its own level of lingering contamination) passed by unremarked overhead, until the Neutester train at last reached the radioactive barrens of the Sarcee Reserve, a place of minimal strategic value that during the Cobalt Galas had nevertheless suffered four—count 'em, four—misdirected or irrationally targeted nuclear strikes.

Calgary.

9 The countryside around Calgary was a glowing moonscape, long since quarantined; and it was into this angry desolation that Thaddeus Thorogood and his warders, spacesuited against the persistent peril, brought the unprotected Alphacrucian and her sole attending disciple.

10 "Give Gamaliel a suit like the ones you're wearing," Mantikhoras said, "or else I'll people this hell with demons whom you'll recognize as former companions, and you, Your Right Reverendship, will be their everlasting Lucifer."

11 The astrogator had never heard his Mistress threaten anyone before, and neither had Thaddeus Thorogood, and soon Gamaliel was undergoing decontamination procedures in a nearby structure prefabricated for that purpose, and soon thereafter donning the same kind of insulated gear and air-filtration system worn by the Neutesters.

12 And Mantikhoras said, "Take him well clear of this scene as soon as he has witnessed the abuses and abominations you intend to inflict upon me in the name of one of my hypostases. My strength is utterly gone."

13 The sky shone red, and the mountains lay about the plain like huge, caries-riddled teeth; and the waters of the Elbow River crept by like molten copper, and over the enigmatic Calgary Tower two-headed vultures circled in silent packs.

14 Thorogood prodded the mantid in the flank with one thickly gloved finger. "If your strength's gone, we'll do with you as we like, and your astrogator isn't going to fare any better once your protection's withdrawn, let me clue you, Lady Mantid." (To his chagrin Gamaliel had been worrying about this very possibility.)

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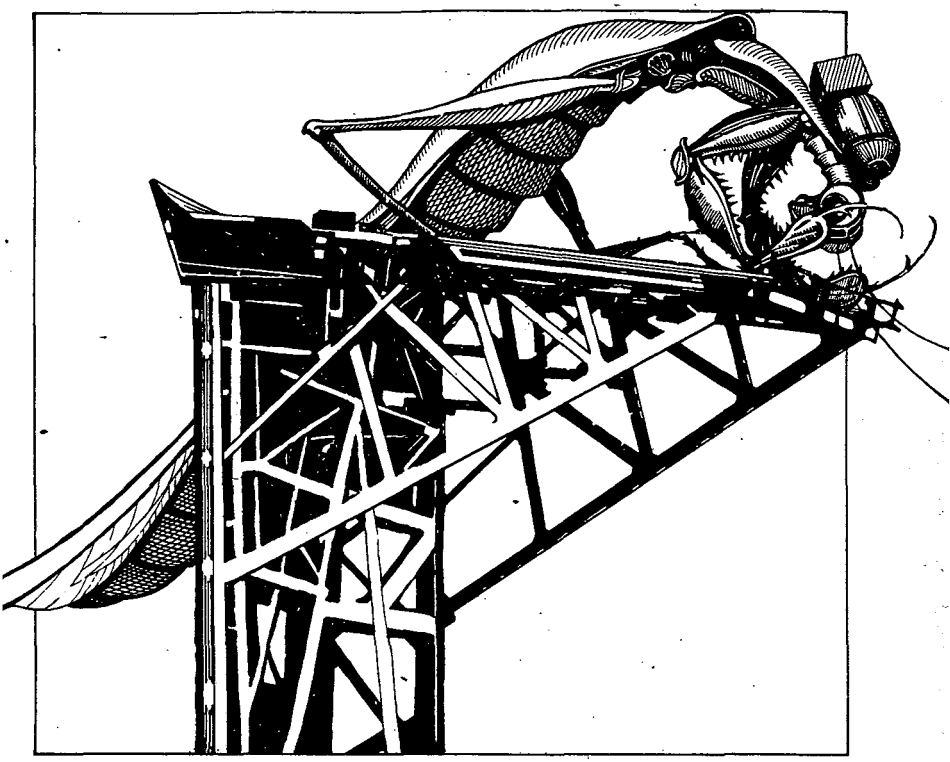

15 Mantikhoras answered, "My strength's renewed through suffering, and in defense of my people, let me clue *you*, I'm a retributive power that disdains even the barrier of death."
16 At this point even Thorogood appeared to waver in his resolve to execute the alien Redeemer: but the visored faces of his warders were looking to him for guidance, and ultimately he chose to cast himself in the role of a redoubtable defender of the faith.
17 Commanded Thorogood, "Let it begin!"
18 More like insects than Mantikhoras herself, the Neutesters besieged her with torments in the shadow of the spindly metal tower whose purpose the astrogator still had not plumbed. Although he struggled to aid his Mistress, the arms of two of Thorogood's beefiest warders prevented him from doing so.
19 And the warders blinded Mantikhoras in one of her multifaceted eyes, and tore from her body two legs from one side and one from the other (so that as they scourged her she almost top-

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pled), and strapped to the chitinous saddle behind her head a nuclear device wired for detonation from afar.

Mantikhoras climbs the tower.

20 And with this device on her back the Neutesters forced her to climb the struts of Calgary Tower, jeering and laughing from the muffling confines of their helmets, and at last she reached the flimsy, riveted lookout a hundred feet or more from the ground;
21 And here the nimble warder who had followed her aloft, catcalling and prodding, put out many of the drupelets in her remaining eye and secured her with heavy chains to the platform.
22 These tasks accomplished, the man pulled off his helmet, cried, "Behold the Alphacrucian zero god!" and, after covering his head again climbed down to ground to the tumultuous (muffled) cheers of his coreligionists and the piteous (muffled) lamentations of Gamaliel the Astrogator.
23 Then, because an arctic wind was howling over the Sarcee moonscape from the Pole, they withdrew to a bunker north of Calgary and from there triggered the device on the helpless mantid's back.
24 Said Thaddeus Thorogood, who had suddenly appeared in the bunker at Gamaliel's side, "That's a relatively clean fission unit, my friend. Your Lady Mantid will be flash-liberated from the snares of corporeality, and there won't be much fallout at all."
25 Gamaliel, who knew there would be more fallout than the chief Neutester could even imagine, said nothing.
26 And an immense dome of light, like a gigantic soap bubble or a globe of mirrors, surrounded the tower on the plain, dazzling both the eyes and the mind; then the tower was swept away in an enormous phallic updraft of phosphorescent debris, a column that built, and built, and built; and Gamaliel could watch no more.

CHAPTER 13

Gamaliel rejoins the others.

1 And when the Neutesters, fearing to defy the final words of Mantikhoras, freed the astrogator, he quickly ascertained the whereabouts of the other disciples and hurried to join them.
2 A small remnant of faithful but disheartened Alphacrucians had gathered together in South Bend, Indiana, there to raise their spirits (insofar as that was possible) by taking in a football game between the University of Notre Dame and the Rock City Rabbinical Institute of Rock City, Tennessee, the winner of this traditional rivalry to play Southern Methodist University two hours

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later in the same stadium.

3 Unfortunately, the game was going forward in a raging acid snowfall, and Gamaliel was unable to reach his wife and fellow disciples until a few minutes before the half.

4 Said Rachelka, embracing her husband on a drifted, half-empty upper tier, "It's zero to zero, honey, and I'm sorry for all of us that there was no body to reclaim. That's why Thorogood did it that way, isn't it? To deny us the opportunity to tender unto her corpse our last respects."

5 And Gamaliel agreed with his wife, and sat down between her and a knobby little man in a raccoon coat (who turned out to be Muggeridge the Chimp in his very own hair), and, glancing around, shook hands with Andrew Stout, and Nicholas Morowitz, and Damaris Brown, and Muggeridge the Chimp, all of whom seemed genuinely glad to see him again.

6 And he placed his hand tenderly on Rachelka's belly (there beneath two cardigans and a goose-down parka) and whispered in her ear, "The kid's got the best seat in the house."

7 And Priscilla Muthinga, edging near with a cup of rapidly chilling coffee for the astrogator, told everyone gaily that the snowflakes eddying about the stadium were "eucharistic particles of the comminute essence of the Redeemer," and that they must all put out their tongues and take her in.

8 The disciples did this, and Gamaliel drank his ice-cold coffee, and they were all zero at the bone there above the zero-to-zero combat between Notre Dame and Rock City Rabbinical.

9 And Andrew, hugging his own shoulders, said, "I thought she'd come back to us in the orthopteran body we knew, not in these goddamn 'eucharistic particles' of some goddamn 'comminute essence'!" And he booed the Notre Dame quarterback for handing off to a snowdrift that had gone in motion to his right.

10 Rachelka observed that it had been over a week since the fission blast near Calgary, and that the odds of a convincing resurrection grew slimmer with every passing day. (Meanwhile, her undelivered baby did a backflip for RCRI, and she clutched her sides in a spasm of agony and wonder.)

11 The game went on and on, and the eucharistic particles of the comminute essence continued to swirl; and both the talk and the hope of a more palpable resurrection faded to zero as zero-to-zero began to loom as the likely final score and in fact prevailed.

A messenger.

12 As the disciples were filing from the stadium, a peanut vendor in a white fur coat and a Jiminy Cricket mask approached

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them and said, "Don't be so down in the mouth, gang. You'll see her again in various guises. Here, have some peanuts."

13 And he tossed them several complimentary bags, most of which Muggeridge managed to intercept.

14 Before the disciples could thank the vendor, he was lost in an eddy of gusting whiteness; and Priscilla vouched that they had seen an angel from the interstellar substratum, which opinion Andrew pooh-poohed and Gamaliel at that time mentally dismissed as so much wish-fulfillment buncombe.

Counterpoint.

15 Many months passed, and contrary to the masked vendor's prophecy Mantikhoras did not appear to any of them again.

16 At last, in the obstetrics ward of a hospital for dependents of the Interstellar Diplomatic Instrument for Outreach, Trade, and Study, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Rachelka was brought to her confinement.

17 Gamaliel was there for the labor, which was protracted and difficult, and when it became clear that Rachelka would not deliver the baby for several more hours yet, one of the attending doctors took Gamaliel into an antechamber with a cot and told him to try to get some sleep.

18 Said this solicitous young woman, "We'll wake you when it's time. That's a promise. Rachelka doesn't need to be worrying about both you *and* the baby, you know." And she left him there.

19 Much against his will and better judgment, Gamaliel obeyed. Sleep stole upon him like the spirit of *gnosis*, and in this slumber he had a dream of such shameful implications that he thrashed about guiltily on the cot and struggled without success to escape the toils of sleep.

20 Meanwhile, Rachelka's labor spontaneously resumed, and the doctor who had led Gamaliel to the antechamber had no time to awaken him and fetch him back to the delivery room, so busy was she doing what she had been trained to do.

21 Mantikhoras entered the room in which the astrogator lay, coming in by the door opposite the place of Rachelka's confinement; and the musky pheromone wafting its scent to Gamaliel from her ovipositors was a summons impossible to ignore.

22 Both aroused and frightened, Gamaliel stood and walked toward the mantid; and she said, "My husband."

23 Gamaliel circled the risen insect, whose body was entire again, even to the replacement of every gouged-out drupelet in her compound eyes; and he kissed her forehead, and held her praying forelimbs, and at her silent urging went abaft to con-

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summate their marriage.

24 Said the doctor to Rachelka, "Push, dear, push"; and she obeyed, grimacing into the lights, and the tiny human passenger in her womb came sliding headfirst into the gentle hands of the obstetrician.

25 But the astrogator, spent, was in the throes of a postcoital ritual unlike any he had ever experienced before, two-stepping somnambulistically in the mantid's curious embrace and staring upward into the green cavern of her open jaws.

26 And Mantikhoras said, "The better to devour you, my worshiper-spouse. The better to make you mine forever and likewise me your everlasting own."

27 And her jaws closed on his skull, crushing it, and in grave peristaltic gulps he was taken upward bone by bone and lifted into a disembodied consciousness where great blooming bowls of light and the blurred aureoles of stars fused in an ever-expanding orgasmic knowledge that obliterated time.

28 Said the doctor to Rachelka, lifting the infant from between her legs into the sheen of the chrome-encircled fluorescents, "It's a boy! And he's perfect perfect perfect!"

29 And someone, remembering Gamaliel, rushed to awaken him, and found him lying on the floor beside his toppled cot, and led him gimpy and sleep-stoned into the familiar brightness of the delivery room, where he smiled at Rachelka and took into his arms the luminous, bawling midge that was his son.

Afterbirth, afterdeath.

30 And later H.K. Bajaj came, and Priscilla Muthinga, and Andrew Stout, and many more members of the Twentieth, along with Damaris and Muggeridge and Edward and so on; and the captain brought word that two expeditions given up for lost had arrived home from the stars.

31 Aboard one of the returning ships, the captain said, there was an adept who, even before the expedition's planetfall on Earth, had predicted the birth of Rachelka and Gamaliel's child by means of the headachy mental flashes that had plagued her during the last stages of their approach.

32 "Over and over again," said Captain Bajaj, "the gift is life, and that is what the adept continually experienced in the pain of her reading. She wishes mother and son health, wealth, and happiness, and she sends her heartfelt congratulations to the father, too."

33 And the captain presented the family a vase of towering

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sunflowers that the adept had sent from her vessel's hydroponic garden.

34 Aboard the second of the returning ships, Captain Bajaj told them, was a hitchhiking energy being, a plasmoidal intelligence scooped from the skin of a gas giant in the Alphard solar system, which bodiless entity was now insistently proclaiming itself a visible fragment of the "soul" of The One.

35 Said Rachelka, cradling her baby, "Is it possible for God to *possess* a soul? I would have thought that The One was nothing, so to speak, *but* soul: a transcendent spiritual being by its very nature synonymous with . . . well, with soulfulness."

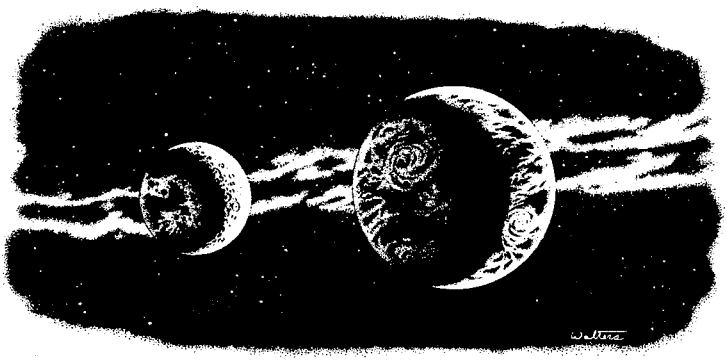
36 Replied Captain Bajaj, picking one of the sunflowers for a boutonniere, "Be that as it may, the Alphardic Plasma wishes to enlist the self-aware species of every world in a revival of the recent Mantic crusade, arguing via energy pulses to the ship's computer that

37 "*A)* the Son of Man and the Daughter of Mantid were its own sibling soulmates and evangelical forerunners, and *B)* the arrival of itself as a kind of Holy Ghostling may be the historical act that at last begins to get its message across here on Earth. What say you to these revelations?"

38 Exchanging a glance gravid with significance but airy with credulous joy, in unison the astrogator and his wife cried, "Hallelujah!"

39 Elsewhere at that moment, to commemorate this day of days and all the days undoubtedly to come, apes in the jungles of Borneo waltzed in prescient glee, while porpoises and killer whales off the coast of Yucatán leapt like living bolts of lightning.

40 And the spirit of Mantikhoras reigned. *Amen.* ●



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ON BOOKS

Orion Shall Rise
By Poul Anderson
Timescape, $16.96, $7.95 (paper)

Poul Anderson (whose first name, if you're wondering, is pronounced somewhere between Paul and pool) is one of those supremely pro (-fessional and -lific) authors who has been publishing for thirty-plus years, whose works sell consistently well, whose science fiction is epitomal and whose all-too-rare fantasy is superb, and yet who somehow has never made that BIG splash, written the one work about which people say, "*This* will be a classic." His latest, a long SF novel, *Orion Shall Rise* seems to be a bid for that, and it may be the one. Time, not I, will decide; in the meantime, there's a swell, old-fashioned (in the best sense) big story for the reader to dig his teeth into.

It's set in the future of the Domain, about which he has written before; his stories about it cover a large time span and only vaguely relate, something in the way of Heinlein's "future history." The place is Earth, and there has been a nuclear holocaust. Some fragments of mankind survive; their various cultures become the roots of the more advanced societies which repopulate the world, now poor in energy and materials —metals and petroleum are precious commodities.

There is the Polynesian flavored Maurai Federation, centered in New Zealand, technologically dominant, carefully managed and conservative; the fiercely independent Northwest Union, stretching from what had been California through Alaska, that places a premium on individualism and is technologically competitive with the Maurais, due to their supply of water power; the Domain, an aristocratically-ruled, near-Medieval society based in France and dominated by Skyholm, the last remaining aerostat (a sort of dirigible satellite, intriguingly conceived); and the Five Nations of the Mong in what had been the American Midwest, dominated by the remains of Russian/Chinese hordes that had swept across the Bering Strait. Otherwise, the Earth is populated by ignorant, sickly barbarians.

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Each of these societies is idiosyncratically and believably wrought, the product of many centuries of post-holocaust social evolution; they are, to our eyes, a curious combination of the primitive and the technologically sophisticated, since nearly the full knowledge of our era has been preserved and the electronics and machines are variations and improvisations governed by the staggering lack of resources of this time.

The plot is a full and busy one, carried through by a host of characters. These come from all of the various cultures; we meet and follow them, getting to know their societies through them, and knowing that they are going to end up together somehow, which they do. Earth has reached another crisis point; someone, somehow, is gathering the strictly forbidden nuclear fuels again and the various major characters are drawn, one way or another, into the resulting international intrigue. There's lots of action—chases, battles, and eventually, full-scale war; one can't exactly call it simple-minded, given the complexity of the background. Perhaps straightforward is the word; Anderson comes from the action-adventure school of the old pulps, and despite all that's going on sociologically, there's still a basic feel of pluck, luck, and fisticuffs leading up to a slam-bang finale.

There's also more than a hint of message. Given the various viewpoints represented by the various countries and individuals, we are presented with all the current pro and con arguments concerning the use of nuclear power, peaceful or martial, set in a context a bit simpler than reality, and at a remove. This, mercifully, never quite gets in the way of the story, and the conclusion is not exactly new, particularly to (and from) the SF community, that technology is good if sensibly used and we've got to find the sense to do so.

The characters, of course, act as spokespersons for the philosophies; while they're not the most interesting bunch of people one can conceive, they still transcend being *simply* one-dimensional points of view, or two-dimensional heroes and villains advancing the action, for that matter. Mostly, that is; the major villain, a Loki-like mischief maker (Anderson, being Anderson, throws in numerous mythological references, usually oblique) has bad teeth, and, presumably to emphasize his villainy, is characterized as the only person in the book that doesn't follow the straight and narrow, sexually. (Is SF returning to the conservative puritanism once so typical of it? Did we ever leave it, come to think of it, despite the

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valiant attempts of some of the more sophisticated writers in the field?) It seems to me, also, that it was only the negative characters who smoked cigarettes.

But it's a big novel, with room for some simplistic lapses; it covers a lot of time and territory, and, for most of that time and through most of that territory, sweeps the reader right along with it. This is a book that should make a great many readers happy.

King's Blood Four
Sheri S. Tepper
$2.50, Ace (paper)

At this point in time, I tend to blanch when, as in Sheri Tepper's *King's Blood Four*, something called a Gamesmaster turns up in the second paragraph. Is there anything so dated as yesterday's fad? And the fantasy gaming fad is well on the way to yesterday. It was fun while it lasted, and certainly a hard core group will continue to have fun and more power to them; there are people who still have a grand old time with Mah-Jongg and hula hoops. But as a general point of reference in a work of fiction, it's taking a lot for granted.

However, in this case I bring this up only to encourage perseverence for readers who may have the same reaction; Tepper transcends her gamesmanship to create a solid fantasy world. It is indeed constructed on gaming; the entire society is a game (the "True Game"), based on power, either natural or magic.

The world that results is a feudal one, with a High King and various Princes and Lords who gather to themselves those with gaming skills and various powers; there are Healers, Elators (who teleport), Seers, Armigers (fliers), Sorcerers, and other talents. The vast majority of the populace are the pawns, who are used or ill-used as circumstances dictate. And there are the Immutables, whose talent is to be unaffected by any of the magic powers of the others, and who stand outside the True Game, regarding it with contempt.

This all sounds like obvious allegory; it is the author's talent to make out of this a living, breathing, convincing world. She has even taken the trouble to provide a source of energy, which is simply heat; it seems that it is a built-in requisite of the psi (or magic—the line is blurred) powers—no heat, no energy, which means a lot of wood is burnt during major battles of the Game, and a Cold Drake, which eliminates warmth, is a deadly antagonist.

Tepper feeds in the rules of her complex world as we go along, but somehow sustains our interest in the early parts of the story even when we don't quite know what's happening,

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another neat trick. Her story itself is fairly fundamental; student gamesman becomes the subject of interest by greater powers and, for various reasons, finds himself pursued in an odyssey in which he eventually learns the reason for his importance. But here is another novel in which the major interest lies in the milieu, the world of the True Game and the various kinds of beings which inhabit it, rather than the main characters and their trials and tribulations. Not that they're unappealing. Peter, the hero; his friend, Yarrel, destined to be a pawn and with the revolutionary idea that the Game might be a rotten system; Silkhands, the chatterbox Healer; they're all intelligent and individualized characters.

One particular scene must be mentioned, at the risk of spoiling the surprise at the absolute outrageousness of it. Perhaps one can be oblique . . . this is certainly the first novel in which a character appears and *knits* two others into existence (and I really mean knits, as with needles and knit one, purl two). Any author who can carry *that* off has got to have a future.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vols. 1–3
Compiled by Donald H. Tuck
Advent Publishers, Inc., $30 each

There have been several fine in-depth reference books dealing with science fiction and fantasy published over the past decade. There are those, such as *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers* and the monumental *Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, that have leaned more toward the scholarly; others, mainly *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, have been angled for use by the general public, for learning, checking out facts, and just plain browsing.

I have occasion to use all of them for one thing or another since unlike the writers for Time/Life et al., I don't have the luxury of a research staff checking every fact (remember that, gentle readers, when I cite a date that's a year off and you want to pick a nit). However, I find myself more often than not grabbing first the "Tuck." This is *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, compiled by Donald H. Tuck. This might be because of sheer familiarity, since it was really the first of the encyclopedic works to appear (or to begin to appear—Vol. 1 was published in 1974, Vol. 2 in 1978).

But it is a most felicitous work as encyclopedias go, and Vol. 3 is finally off the press, after a wait as long as that for *The Silmarillion*; the first two volumes have been out of print for some time, and are now

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available again. Somehow it hits a fine balance between the scholarly and the browsable; the information is legion, but it's presented succinctly, readably, and usably.

The initial two volumes are almost entirely devoted to what is called a "Who's Who," the major authors presented alphabetically. For each there is a brief bio, and then a bibliography. The latter sounds simple enough, but given the fact that so many of the classic works of SF were published in bits and pieces in magazines, then shuffled, redealt, and rewritten to be published in book form, sorting out the oeuvre of many writers in the field is quite a job. Tuck excels at this, and, in addition, gives a very short but usually accurate idea of the theme of each novel, the contents of every collection and anthology, and the long and short stories that go to make up the series that are so endemic to SF. These volumes alone would be an extraordinary achievement.

The newly published one is labelled "Miscellaneous" and is that, but a mine of information as well. There is a section on "Magazines" (science fiction, remember, was almost entirely magazine fiction until the middle of this century) which gives not only such obvious matters as a checklist of issues, but (gasp!) the major story in each issue of the important periodicals—quite something considering, for instance, that 436 issues of *Amazing* are covered. Foreign language magazines are listed (at least one in Rumanian), and there are the obscure and intriguing examples with names such as the *Aldine Cheerful Library* and *Web Terror Stories*.

Then there are sections devoted to "Paperbacks" which gives all the paperback editions of all the major books and many of the minor ones, by author, title, *and* by publisher; "Pseudonyms," which have been numerous in SF's past (often "respectable" authors who didn't want it known they wrote that stuff, sometimes women who felt they wouldn't be taken seriously as such); "Series, Connected Stories, and Sequels" by key word, character or subject, with reference to the author to check for more detail; and finally "General," a catch-all listing.

In my use of the first two volumes, I have found them astonishingly accurate; I can but judge that this new one is equally so. It should be noted that the cut-off point for all the information contained is 1968 (except for the "Pseudonyms" section, which is current); the emphasis is obviously historical therefore, but there are enough reference books dealing with the past decade available

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to make up for that.

In all, I can but repeat that it's quite an achievement and an obvious labor of love (especially considering that Mr. Tuck lives in Tasmania), and would like here and now to publicly make known my gratitude to Donald Tuck for the help his work has been to me, and will undoubtedly continue to be.

Prince of the Godborn and The Children of the Wind (Seven Citadels, Pts. 1 & 2)
By Geraldine Harris
Greenwillow Books, $9.00 each

There's a growing rebellion against multi-volume novels in science fiction and fantasy; the readers are muttering, "Mutiny, mutiny." Whether this really means anything or not is a question; if something in four volumes comes along that gets the praise of a "Book of the New Sun," I somehow doubt it will be passed up because it's multiple. But it is true—the trend seems out of hand. These books are a case in point. Four volumes of "Seven Citadels" are projected. Two are published simultaneously, the next two to appear (together) eventually. Since the two to hand are relatively slim volumes, one might think they could have been published as one, at less cost to the consumer.

They *are* published as juveniles, if that's an excuse. In *my* juvenile days (going on the theory that they're over), I liked a fat book.

It's a little unfair to load the foregoing complaint on this set, admittedly, considering the number of multi-parted novels being published in fits and starts. (I won't even go into the "At least why can't they publish all of a set at once?" question.) The first two sections of Geraldine Harris's "Seven Citadels," entitled *Prince of the Godborn* and *The Children of the Wind* respectively, are an uneven mixture of the simple-minded and the sophisticated.

It's the one about the created world where magic works and the Empire (here Galkis, after its principal city) is sliding rapidly downhill into decadence. It is ruled by the Godborn, descendents of the Empire's one and only deity, who have special physical and magical characteristics. Young Prince Kerish-lo-Taan goes off after a fabled Saviour, accompanied by his half-brother, Forollkin, who is declassé, since he's only the son of the Emperor by a concubine. (There weren't no concubines in the juveniles of *my* day.) Kerish is weak in the martial arts and somewhat uppity, but he *is* Godborn; Forollkin, of course, is bluff, brave, not very bright, and an ordinary mortal type—the Godborn genes seem rather random in their distribution.

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The quest consists of finding seven sorcerers who live outside the Empire; each has a key which will open the casket which contains the next key which will open the casket that contains . . . you get the idea. The seven are seemingly more or less immortal, and the information on them is pretty vague. The first is the benevolent ruler of a sort of Isle of the Blessed, that Kerish's mission will bring the ruin of; the second a spoiled child that specializes in illusions; the third a silver-haired lady who lives in a castle of ice who long ago quarreled with the fourth, who was her lover, and so on.

As you can see, none of the basic ideas of the novel are exactly bursting with originality, but Harris does manage to flesh out what could have been just a silly fable with a lot of lively detail, and much of it achieves a sort of reality with a certain amount of depth—nothing over one's head, but more than just a fairy-tale juvenile. The Court of the Godborn is nicely decadent—poison at dinner and that sort of fun. The Utopic Isle is something like entering a Maxfield Parrish painting, where everyone wears gracefully draped robes and lives in Greek pavilions among groves of trees. Then there's beating the way through the steaming swamps with the Or-gar-gee hunters on the way to the ice palace lady, whose domicile has a surrealistically creepy air about it.

The question is whether the pace can be kept up through four volumes and seven sorcerers. So far, so good.

Recently published by those associated with this periodical: *Caught In the Organ Draft: Biology in Science Fiction* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, price $12.95.

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

It's the season for con(vention)s with Bradley, Kurtz & Lichtenberg (October people, as Bradbury put it). Make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. When calling, say who you are right away. Look for me behind the big Filthy Pierre badge at cons.

OCTOBER, 1983

7–10—**EarthCon.** For info, write: **Box 22041, Beachwood OH 44122.** Or phone: **(216) 351–1663** or **(313) 471–6932** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Cleveland, OH (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: Jacqueline (Zeor) Lichtenberg, Marion Z. (Darkover) Bradley, Katherine (Deryni) Kurtz, Jean (Savage Empire) Lorrah.

7–9—**WindyCon,** Hilton Hotel, Arlington Park (Chicago) IL. G. R. R. Martin, V. Poyser, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, fan Ben Yalow, Moebius Theater. Chicago must've recovered from the 1982 WorldCon.

14–16—**RoVaCon. (703) 389–9400.** C. J. ("Downbelow Station") Cherryh, artist Kelly Freas, M. A. Foster, Ralph Roberts. Out of the high school now, into the Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke VA.

14–16—**Contradiction,** John's Niagara Hotel, Niagara Falls NY 14302. Judith Merrill. Masquerade.

28–30—**NecronomiCon, Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.** Tampa FL. Piers Anthony, Robert (Horseclans) Adams, fans Bill Ritch & Ken Mitchroney. Alien cooking lessons, masquerade, trivia quiz.

28–30—**World Fantasy Con, Box 423, Oak Forest IL 60452.** Chicago IL. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, Robert ("Psycho") Bloch, Manly Wade Wellman, artist Rowena Morrill. The WorldCon for fantasy fans. Theme: "60 Years of 'Weird Tales,' " the Chicago-based pulp magazine of fond memory. Emphasis is on dark fantasy (horror, sword-&-sorcery, etc.). Join at the door for $35.

NOVEMBER 1983

11–13—**OrwellCon, Suykerbuyk, A. Vermeylenlaan 21, bus 20, B-2050 Antwerp, Belgium.** Anthony ("Clockwork Orange") Burgess, Soviet SF writer Alexander Zinoviev. Anticipating 1984.

11–13—**OryCon, Box 14727, Portland OR 97214. (503) 283-0802.** Octavia Butler. At Hilton Hotel.

11–13—**IncogniCon, Box 15776, Sta. F, Ottawa ON K2C 3S7.** A. J. Offutt (John "Spaceways" Cleve).

18–20—**PhilCon, Box 8303, Philadelphia PA 19101.** The oldest science fiction con, founded 1936.

18–20—**Outre-Vention, 2246 Windsor, Salt Lake City UT 84106.** Poul (Polesotechnic) Anderson, artists Lynnanne & Michael Goodwin. Masquerade. From the folks who gave us Intervention.

25–27—**Darkover Council, c/o Morman, 551 Brummel Ct., Washington DC 20012.** Wilmington DE. Nancy Springer, M. Z. Bradley, H. (Mission of Gravity) Clement, K. (Deryni) Kurtz, H. Shapero, P. E. Zimmer, M. Rogers, D. Paxon, singers Clam Chowder. Also "Regional Mythopoeic Con."

AUGUST, 1984

30–Sep. 3—**LACon 2, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** Anaheim CA. '84 WorldCon. Membership $40.

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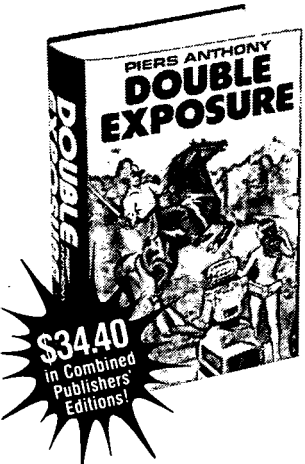

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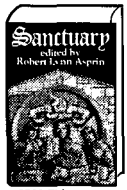

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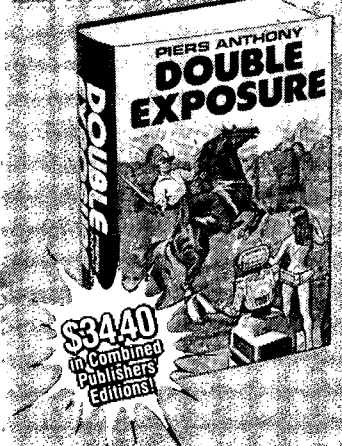

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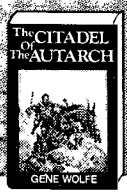

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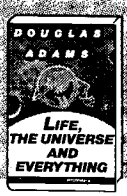

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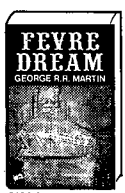

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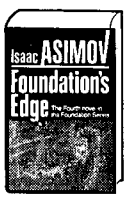

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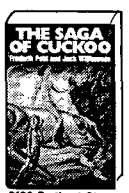

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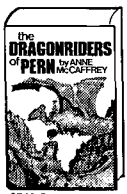

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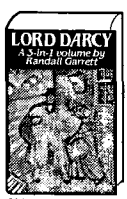

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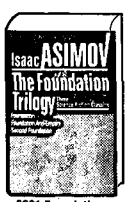

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